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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

LOVE AND POLITICS

Aristophanes *Lysistrata*: An Interpretation

by

Murray Krantz

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER of ARTS

Department of Political Science

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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Aristophanes *Lysistrata*: An Interpretation

submitted by Murray Krantz in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER of ARTS.

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Supervisor

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Date 20 Sept 1991

Dedication

To my Mother, and two dear friends

Daniel and Catherine with gratitude

Abstract

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* is the poet's third and final surviving play which advocates peace. This play differs from the previous ones since it is not concerned about peace only for particular individuals, but for all the Greeks. As well, the peace is not negotiated with any direct assistance from the gods. In *Lysistrata*, peace is obtained by means of a fantastic scheme wherein the women deny sexual intercourse to their warrior-husbands. The women also seize and occupy the Acropolis in Athens in order to control the war treasury. In typical Aristophanean style, the play is laced with vulgarity. The fantastic elements and the low humour leave most readers perplexed concerning any serious thoughts Aristophanes has regarding political life. Yet in the course of a serious analysis of *Lysistrata*, one finds that the poet raises and investigates several important issues, including: the "war between the sexes"; the necessity of a proper education; and perhaps even a practical solution to the Peloponnesian War. Amongst these specific issues lies the tacit rivalry between poetry and philosophy. Throughout *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes impresses the reader with his understanding of, and appreciation for, the city's laws and conventions, as well as with his recognition of there being an important role for the wise.

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Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
Dedication	iv
Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vi
I. Introduction	1
II. Assembly and Greetings	7
III. Purpose, Strategy and Committal	17
IV. Men, Women and their Laws	28
V. The Audacity of a Poet: Indecency & Immorality	47
VI. Reconciliation	64
VII. Conclusion	79
Bibliography	86

I. Introduction

On the surface Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, like many of his other plays, is a fantasy.[1] The women of Greece, led by Lysistrata, deny sex to their husbands and all men in order to put an end to the Peloponnesian War. There are other aspects to the affair as well. For example, the character of the Athenian *demos* also requires Lysistrata to seize the city's treasury, whereas this is neither necessary nor possible in Sparta. But the crux of the plot is the "sex revolt." The women are entirely successful in all of their plans: the Spartan men cannot endure their sexual torment and come to Athens to sue for peace; the Athenian warriors are also suffering; and the war effort is halted by a lack of funds. In the end, a peace is negotiated between all of the Greek cities, and the men are reunited with their wives. This successful enterprise is fantastical not only because women were not politically active in 411 B.C., but because Aristophanes does not allow any of the obvious alternative actions to occur. Namely, the men do not opt for other means of sexual gratification, the women are not physically removed from the Acropolis, and the women without husbands (and who might take advantage of the situation to steal someone else's) do not betray Lysistrata's call for continence. Aristophanes confines these people to moral behaviour for the good of the household and the cities of Greece.

A closer examination of the play, however, indicates that there is more serious consideration being given by the poet to certain issues than might be first thought. The comedy could be seen or read without the majority of the audience recognizing Aristophanes' "political" propositions; the more serious spectator, however, is challenged to think about the issues at hand. First, there is the seemingly eternal issue of the so-called war between the sexes. What is the cause of this war, and are there any viable solutions? How much of the tension is caused by natural differences of the sexes, and how much by nurture? And politically, how do the differences affect the functioning of the household and the city? In *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes identifies several differences between the sexes which have profound implications for how the sexes should behave to attain order, or harmony.

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[1]The English translation of *Lysistrata* to be referred to is from *Aristophanes Comedies*, Translated by the Athenian Society, (New York: Rarity Press, 1931).

Other issues pertain to war and peace among states, epitomized by the problem of how peace can be restored in all of Greece. By having the women perform this action in *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes conceals these serious proposals more than he does his thoughts about the relationship between the sexes. For who would even consider it a possibility that women could end the war by withholding sexual favours? Yet, if one considers what the "women" might **represent**, there perhaps is a practical political solution being suggested. For example, the women might be seen as the peace party of the male citizenry, while the men represent the war party; and there may be practical analogues to the various elements of the women's plot.

Throughout *Lysistrata* there is also tacitly present the issue of education, and particularly the education of women. Women cannot be neglected in this regard because of their role in nurturing children and exercising power over men. How women raise their children, and what they demand of their men, ultimately affect the character of the household and the city. If left unbridled, the desires women have for wealth, luxury, **and peace** could threaten the health of the city -- for there are times that peace-at-any-price is not best for the city. How, then, are women to be properly educated? Lysistrata appears to be Aristophanes' example of the educated woman. While all of the Athenian women admit to having had an education -- a religious education intended to promote "love-of-city" -- only Lysistrata admits to having learned "wise teachings" from the city's elders. She was born with discriminating judgement and this was further developed by her nurture. In this, according to her own account, her father played a major role. But the larger questions of education do not pertain only to women. Lysistrata thinks about the whole city's problems and develops a solution, and she cares enough about the city to propose her plan. Lysistrata, a relatively unknown woman who has not previously been politically active, enters the political realm to improve the situation, and then exits from it once the situation is resolved. As such, she may stand for a new kind of wisdom being brought to bear on political life. Lysistrata is different from Socrates as characterized and criticized in the *Clouds*, but perhaps similar to Socrates as Plato characterizes him in the *Republic*.

This reference to Socrates is not irrelevant, since Aristophanes is probably most famous for his criticism of the philosopher in the *Clouds*. In Socrates' trial, as portrayed by Plato, the philosopher argues that many men accused him of being "a wise man, a thinker on the things aloft, who has investigated all things under the earth, and who makes the weaker speech the stronger."[2] Socrates also explains that it is not possible to name all of these accusers, "unless a certain one happens to be a comic poet."[3] Subsequently, Socrates refers to Aristophanes by name. These references are not intended to suggest that a personal animosity existed between Aristophanes and Socrates (or Plato); in the *Symposium* Plato shows Aristophanes and Socrates to be friendly, and in considerable agreement about the role of *eros*. What is important in the context of this commentary is the tension between poetry and philosophy, an issue which Aristophanes raises in the *Clouds* and Plato explores in the *Republic*. As Allan Bloom observes:

> ... the truth which poetry reveals is only a partial truth, and, in liberating from the conventions or laws of a city, it can contribute to an enslavement to the source of convention, the love of one's own. Reason is the only instrument with which to fight laughter and pity. But poetry belongs essentially to the faculty of imagination, a faculty necessary to reasoning, one, however, which can also be at war with it. The overcoming of the attachment to one's own is a monstrous endeavor, and the passions served by poetry rebel against it; but that endeavor is necessary to philosophy. This, then, is the essence of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry.[4]

How does *Lysistrata* contribute to this debate? Are the characters limited simply to *nomos* (ie., laws, conventions, customs), or is there any indication that some of the characters move beyond *nomos* towards a less conventional, more "natural" understanding of the world?

The forementioned issues which Aristophanes raises in *Lysistrata* are not always recognized by the poet's various commentators. Some academics even suggest that there are no serious issues worthy of consideration. For example, Moses Hadas argues that "Aristophanes wrote for a specific audience and occasion, and would have laughed at the

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[2]Plato, *Apology of Socrates*, Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 18b.
[3]ibid., 18d.
[4]Allan Bloom, "Interpretative Essay" in *The Republic of Plato," (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1968), p. 434.*

thought that remote generations might be fingering his plays."[5] Although Hadas subsequently observes that Aristophanes' comedy is memorable because of its "exquisite lyrics and its serious commentary -- on politics, poetry, education, good citizenship,"[6] one is left wondering how seriously Hadas can take Aristophanes as a thinker, given his historicist overview. For many scholars, it seems to be the poetic craftsmanship and resulting entertainment which are taken most seriously. Kenneth McLeish, for example, considers only the dramatic elements of the play and glosses over all of the serious issues:

> As we read or see Aristophanes' plays today, the overwhelming impression is one of rightness. Language, stage action, controlling themes and metaphors all combine to make a single, unified entertainment. Many stage comedies, including some of the finest ... tend to sprawl, to tug in several directions at once. In Aristophanes the dramatic 'line' of each play is clear and straight; it binds a dozen diverse elements into a coherent whole. Even characters of scenes which at first seem to be there solely for their own sake (such as Euripides in *Acharnians* or the Myrrhine/Kinesias scene) in fact fit into and help to shape dramatic unity.[7]

Another slighting treatment is offered by Charles Rowan Beye who uses *Lysistrata* merely as evidence that most men in Athens did prefer heterosexual over homosexual intercourse. Beye does not think that the play addresses any of the important political realities of Aristophanes' time:

> Much as it addresses the overriding horror of the times, the *Lysistrata* steers clear of any precisely Athenian topic -- this in 411, a year of Athens's loss of Euboea and its own political turmoil in which shortly after the festival a revolutionary oligarchic government overcame the democracy in Athens.[8]

Although other commentators do consider certain issues to have a permanence in political life, the issues are not explored in any depth. K.J. Dover neglects much of Lysistrata's teaching about politics and education implicit in her metaphoric solution to the war:

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[5]Moses Hadas, "Introduction" to *The Complete Plays of Aristophanes*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), p. 2.
[6]Ibid., pp. 6-7.
[7]Kenneth McLeish, *The Theatre of Aristophanes*, (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1980), p. 164.
[8]Charles Rowan Beye, *Ancient Greek Literature and Society*, 2nd ed., (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 179.

> When Lysistrata is asked by the proboulos what she would do to bring Athens safe out of its perils, her recipe, closely modelled on how women deal with a tangle of wool and in the end make a cloak out of it, begins with 'embassies hither and thither' but **insensibly** passes into what is a recipe not so much for peace as for strength, ... implying that from a position of strength one can get a peace which is to one's own advantage.'

Ultimately, Dover seems to be perplexed at Aristophanes' intention in *Lysistrata*, as evidenced in his final words on the play:

> The ending of the play with a Spartan singer invoking and praising deities who are also (particularly Athena, of course) deities in Athenian eyes is a more powerful reminder than the negotiation scene that not only sexual love, but also international festivals and poetry and dancing are much more enjoyable than war. But did Aristophanes or anyone else really believe that peace, however desirable, was to be had in 411 without concessions which would weaken and impoverish the Athenians more than they would tolerate?[10]

A similar kind of treatment is given by Lois Spatz. While Spatz observes that the "exchanging of roles and blending of images suggests that similarities between men and women, like those between enemies, are really stronger than the obvious differences,"[11] there is no thorough examination of the similarities or differences of the sexes or enemies. Spatz also appears to trivialize the serious issues being addressed in *Lysistrata* as evidenced by her concluding remarks:

> Like the other peace plays, *Lysistrata* reveals that making love is more fun than making war. But it is difficult to assign to Aristophanes a policy which he seriously advocates to the citizens of Athens in 411. Lysistrata's advice is only a general recommendation for ejecting the bad citizens from power and using the best most efficiently. Very little of the satire is really topical.[12]

A more extensive analysis is offered by Jeffrey Henderson who persistently questions Aristophanes' political intentions in *Lysistrata*. Henderson is one of the few commentators who even notices that Aristophanes leaves Lysistrata's own purpose a mystery. Henderson takes Aristophanes seriously and recognizes that the reader is challenged to uncover the deeper meaning. Concerning the play in general, Henderson observes the following:

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[9]K.J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 161, my emphasis.
[10]Ibid., p. 161.
[11]Lois Spatz, *Aristophanes*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 100.
[12]Ibid., p. 102.

> We must not, however, imagine that *Lysistrata* was a purely escapist entertainment. True observation and just advice are as much a part of comedy as fantasy, distortion, and farce. Indeed, there were thoughts best publicly articulated in comic guise. Who in 411 could tell the Athenians that the Probouloi were decrepit bunglers, that the politicians were selfish and thievish, and that the Spartans were old friends? Who could give public expression to the desolation and fear suffered by the women? It was the comic poet who gave communal expression to the social currents running beneath the surface of public discourse, and his actors were, after all, men in disguise speaking to their mates in the audience.[13]

Henderson argues that there is a political message in the play: "the situation is fantastic but realizable in principle, and the actions of the characters are not fundamentally outside the realm of human possibility."[14] These comments are consistent with what I believe to be true. The issue of education, however, and the sexual differences are not addressed in depth by Henderson. Nevertheless, Henderson is one of the better commentators because he takes the poet seriously and shows a concern not only for the detail, but for the larger purpose of the play as well.

Perhaps the best analysis of *Lysistrata* is offered by Leo Strauss, who strongly argues that Aristophanes is worthy of serious consideration, and who identifies many of the issues at hand.[15] As well, Strauss includes Aristophanes in what could be considered a dialogue between the most serious political thinkers, most notably Plato, regarding many permanent philosophic questions. Strauss' commentary on *Lysistrata* is very dense and provocative, and one is directed to the play itself to explore his opinions. A reading of the play becomes, then, a philosophic exercise.

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[13]Jeffrey Henderson, *Aristophanes "Lysistrata,"* (New York: Claredon Press, 1987), p. xxx-xxxi.
[14]Ibid., p. xxxii.
[15]Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966).

II. Assembly and Greetings

The play begins with a brief soliloquy by Lysistrata. She is upset about having to wait for her invited guests, but it is unclear how long she has been waiting. Lysistrata, although a woman herself, has an unflattering opinion about women generally. Women, she exclaims, would be quick to celebrate Dionysus, the god of wine and ecstasy, or Pan, a god known for his laziness and sexual exploits, or Aphrodite, the insatiable goddess of desire, or lastly Genetyllis, a deity presiding over the act of generation. Women are less enthusiastic, however, to meet with her about the object of her invitation. *Lysistrata* begins, therefore, with a charge against women for being licentious -- a charge made by a woman. From the start of the play, Lysistrata separates herself from the rest of her sex, and her charge initiates the philosophic consideration about the nature of women and men, and their interrelationship.

Immediately following these brief complaints, Lysistrata is joined by her neighbor Calonice who asks her why she looks upset. In the neighbor's opinion, Lysistrata does not "look a bit pretty with those black lowering brows." What could be so upsetting as to cause one to forsake one's pretty looks? Without realizing it, Calonice supports Lysistrata's belief that women are interested in matters of less importance than the one she has summoned them here to discuss. Lysistrata vents her frustration by explaining that her heart is on fire and that she is embarrassed for her sex; Lysistrata is angry that women do not automatically share her opinions about the issue, whatever it is. The importance of beauty, then, is the next major issue raised. Ironically, the women's concern for beauty will not be inconsequential in the play.

Adding to her list of charges, Lysistrata complains that women are lazy. Instead of coming to meet with her about a "not paltry matter," they prefer to lie in bed. Calonice defends her colleagues' tardiness by attributing it to their household duties, including taking care of husbands, servants, and children. Traditionally at least, these are a woman's priorities. Nevertheless, Lysistrata continues to assert that the business calling the women to meet with her is much more urgent. This further separates Lysistrata from her sex since Calonice accords greater recognition to the demands placed on women than does Lysistrata. What sort

of household does Lysistrata have? Is she married? Is she widowed? Has she had any children, and if she is a mother, are her children still at home? Aristophanes is silent about Lysistrata's life, but any household duties that she might have clearly do not restrict her from leaving her house. Calonice's observation is valid, however, since most women are not free to leave the house at any time they please, if only because other people depend on them. Although it is frequently argued that the demands of husbands and servants should not be restrictive, it is harder to argue this for children. The children identify an essential bodily difference between men and women -- it is difficult for a woman to leave her house if she has a baby who requires a feeding. Nevertheless, Lysistrata asserts that her business is more urgent than any of this.

Perhaps recognizing the impasse in their opinions about women, Calonice asks Lysistrata why she has summoned the women. She does not ask why only women have been invited. Lysistrata explains that it is about a "big affair" and Calonice misinterprets this explanation to mean that it is about some long and thick male sex organ. They both agree that if the urgent business were about male sex organs, the women would have been present much sooner; women are not indifferent when it comes to sex. But Lysistrata corrects Calonice and admits that she has given this matter a great deal of thought. In fact, she has had many sleepless nights because of it. This is misinterpreted as well, but Lysistrata is surprisingly patient with Calonice. She continues to explain that the business is so fine and subtle that it means Greece will be saved by the women. Calonice is not optimistic about Greece being saved by women, and this signals a reversal in thinking by the two neighbors about the nature of women. Until now, Lysistrata has been identifying the faults of women and Calonice has been speaking in their defence. Now, however, Calonice is pessimistic about the nature of women, while Lysistrata believes that they are indeed capable of achieving a great task. The private and public roles of women are in dispute: Calonice has emphasized the private duties of women in the household and is unfamiliar with potential public roles; Lysistrata has ignored the private role and focuses on the public.

Lysistrata believes that the women of Athens can undo the Peloponnesians and exterminate the Boeotians, but "if the Boeotian and Peloponnesian women join us, Greece is saved." In this, Lysistrata hints at having an alternative plan ready for Athens if the foreign women do not support her idea. Support for this is revealed later when Lysistrata explains to Lampito that the older Athenian women have already been ordered to seize the Acropolis; this plan of action was initiated by Lysistrata before knowing the outcome of her current negotiations. Lysistrata appears to identify herself as an Athenian first, and as a Greek second. Luckily for Lysistrata, and Greece, the foreign delegations will decide to support her. It is unlikely that Lysistrata could end the war and secure acceptable terms of peace for Athens without the Spartans also being willing to negotiate. Hence, although Lysistrata has an alternative plan, it likely is a plan whose potential consequences are less acceptable.

Calonice thinks it would be a noble deed to undo the Peloponnesians, and once Lysistrata promises to spare the Boeotian eels, she is eager to know how the women will do it. How will the women "perform so wise and glorious an achievement," when all they do is retire in the household, adorned with beautiful clothes, flowers and slippers? This image of women is different from the one Calonice first presented, where women laboured for their husbands, servants and children. Even though women have household chores to perform, they enjoy looking their best. Once Lysistrata explains that these are exactly the characteristics of women that will be required, Calonice is eager to be included. She loves to wear yellow tunics and flowing gowns and slippers -- her individual good, then, will not be compromised by serving the common good. It will not be a hardship. One wonders why Calonice, the one named "Beautiful Victory," so loves to adorn herself: is it for the sake of a beautiful victory? If so, then victory over whom? The obvious answer -- which is exactly the issue in this play -- is that women have the potential of scoring a victory over their husbands by exploiting their beauty. With this additional information, Calonice agrees with Lysistrata that the other women should have already arrived, and now she is also impatient to get started. Lysistrata's efforts to gain Calonice's support have been successful, even though she has not told her any of the details of the plan.

Turning back to a discussion of her invited guests, Lysistrata comments that Athenians do everything too late; she is frustrated that her plan may not succeed. Presented roughly two years after the Sicilian disaster of 413 B.C., this comment in *Lysistrata* likely refers to the Athenian general Nicias who failed to extract his troops quickly enough from Sicily to escape total disaster. Nicias' colleague, Demosthenes, had disagreed with Nicias' plan to remain in Sicily following the defeat at Epipolae. Like Demosthenes, Lysistrata is aware of the importance of timing, and of the combination of thought and action in war. And by her own testimony, she has already given this matter a great deal of thought. It is now time for her plan to be acted upon. If it is fair to say that men tend to have less patience than women, Lysistrata's impatience may be a reflection of a more masculine nature.[16]

Since Aristophanes relies upon the audience understanding the current political milieu of Athens, a brief description of Athens' situation in 411 B.C. might be helpful to modern readers. The culminating event of the war thus far was the disaster at Sicily when Athens lost her entire fleet and army. The Athenian treasury was exhausted and most of the allies revolted. Nevertheless, Athens managed to build a new fleet and was successful in halting Spartan efforts at Corinth in 412 B.C. The Athenians were also successful in rebuilding alliances, despite Spartan challenges. As J.B. Bury observes, however, "At Athens in these months there was distress, fear and discontentment."[17] The Spartans were attempting to form an alliance with the Persians, whereby the Greek cities of Asia Minor were to be given to Persia in return for monetary support to defeat Athens. In reality, this effort was breaking down, and Alkibiades -- the exiled Athenian who had initiated the Spartan/Persian alliance to begin with -- was formulating an agreement between Persia and Athens. In *Lysistrata*, however, there is no evidence that Aristophanes knew about Alkibiades' plans. Although the Athenians had begun to recapture old territory, the Sicilian expedition had seriously wounded the Athenian war effort and the Athenian morale. Pisander describes the state of Athens at this time as follows:

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[16]That patience is more akin to the female nature is perhaps best revealed in their nurturing of children.

[17]J.B. Bury and Russell Meiggs, *A History of Greece to the Death of Alexander the Great*, (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1975), p. 308.

> 'Now that the Peloponnesians have as many ships as we have ready to fight us at sea, now that they have more cities as their allies, and now that the King and Tissaphernes are supplying them with money, while ours is all gone, have you any hope that Athens can survive unless someone can persuade the King to change sides and come over to us?'[18]

In response to Lysistrata's complaints that the women from the shoreward parts (Salamis and Acharnae) have not arrived, and particularly those from the warlike territory of Acharnae, Calonice advises her that she knows the women from Salamis embarked at daybreak. As well, she is certain that Theagenes' wife will arrive from Megara since she had consulted Hecate about the invitation. In other words, there exists an underground communication network which Lysistrata may not be aware of. That this could also threaten the success of her mission is not discussed because the women begin to arrive. The report of their doing so, however, identifies a practical reason why the women would be late in arriving. Namely, some women have to come from cities far away from Athens. Lysistrata's specific reference to the warlike territory of Acharnae perhaps indicates that this assembly will need women with especially warlike characters. As we subsequently learn, the women will wage a war to end the war.[19]

Lysistrata recognizes the first delegation of women to be from Anagyra, a small deme of Attica. According to Calonice, this delegation includes the entire female population of the community. The spokeswoman from Anagyra is Myrrhine, who addresses Lysistrata directly and asks if they are late. Myrrhine's question is ignored, whereupon she pleads with Lysistrata to explain her purpose of calling them together. Noticeably absent is an apology by Myrrhine for being late, and Lysistrata is unimpressed; she criticizes the new arrival for not being more eager about this affair of urgency. Mirroring Calonice, Myrrhine makes an excuse for her actions and then asks what it is that Lysistrata considers to be so pressing. The difference between Myrrhine's and Calonice's responses, however, is that Myrrhine is more willing to defend herself -- she could not find her girdle in the dark. Calonice did not explain

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[18]Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Translated by Rex Warner, (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985), VIII.53, pp. 568-9.

[19]Lysistrata expects the women from Acharnae to be most interested because of their heavy losses in the war. This fact had made the Acharnians more warlike and anti-Spartan. (Jeffrey Henderson, p. 74.)

why in particular she was late. In addition, Lysistrata has dealt with the two women differently. With Calonice, Lysistrata blamed her entire sex with having misdirected priorities, and Calonice came to her sex's defence. With Myrrhine, Lysistrata's charges are more personal. Nevertheless, the result of Myrrhine's explanation is that she also confirms Lysistrata's opinions about women: both Calonice and Myrrhine care more about external beauty than the more urgent matters as she defines them. Yet it will be Myrrhine's exemplary external beauty that is exploited in the play as a means for the women to fulfill Lysistrata's purpose. There is tension for Lysistrata between what she has already identified as the means to the end (ie., female beauty) and what is required to acquire the means (ie., women's preoccupation with their beauty). In the course of the play, Lysistrata will admit to being embarrassed by her sex, as well as to being discouraged by the female heart and weakness.

Myrrhine agrees that it would be best to wait for the other delegations to arrive before Lysistrata reveals her purpose, and thereupon spots the arrival of Lampito. Once again, Lysistrata's greeting is different for this new member. Lysistrata is very pleasant and addresses Lampito as her dear friend. This is the first time that Lysistrata has used the word "friend" to describe any of these women, which is significant since Lampito is from Sparta -- the primary enemy of Athens. Lysistrata also pays Lampito a compliment, albeit a compliment Calonice and Myrrhine and most other women would not find especially flattering. Instead of saying Lampito is pretty or beautiful, or is wearing nice clothes or adornments, Lysistrata describes her as looking well and handsome, with a rosy complexion, adding that Lampito appears strong enough to be able to strangle a bull. These compliments seem more fitting for men than for women, at least for women like Calonice and Myrrhine, yet Lampito is flattered. She agrees that she could strangle a bull since she does gymnastics and practices the kick dance.[20] Lysistrata proceeds to comment on Lampito's superb bosoms

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[20]This is consistent with what Plutarch says about the importance of physical exercise for Spartan women: "First [Lycurgus] toughened the girls physically by making them run and wrestle and throw the discus and javelin. Thereby their children in embryo would make a strong start in strong bodies and would develop better, while the women themselves would also bear their pregnancies with vigour and would meet the challenge of childbirth in a successful, relaxed way." (Plutarch, *Plutarch on Sparta*, Translated by Richard J.A. Talbert, (Markham: Penguin Books,

but Lampito halts Lysistrata by telling her that she is feeling her as if she were a beast for sacrifice. Lysistrata discontinues praising the Spartan and immediately turns her attention to another new arrival.

Aristophanes appears to be using these women to exemplify important characteristics of their respective regimes. The Athenian Calonice is concerned about looking pretty and she adores the possibility of wearing beautiful clothes. Myrrhine, who comes from a deme of Athens, is also concerned about looking pretty. That is, both women concern themselves more with **apparent** beauty and health. Also, they both care for the newer luxuries associated with being female. Lampito, however, aligns her beauty with health and strength; she is more rustic and natural. In other words, while Athens is perhaps preoccupied with adornment (ie., female?), Sparta is devoted to strength and war (ie., male?). One wonders what Greece as a whole represents. These questions will continue to be explored throughout *Lysistrata*.[21] At this point in the play, suffice it to say that Lysistrata knows enough about the cultural differences of the regimes to be able to flatter a Spartan woman. But it should not be overlooked that all of the women share a concern for their beauty which transcends the cultural barriers, despite their not seeming to agree on precisely what such beauty is.

Lampito introduces the next (unnamed) woman as a noble lady from Boeotia, and Lysistrata calls her a pretty Boeotian friend. Lysistrata compares her to a blooming garden and Calonice comments on how prettily weeded this woman's garden is. Again, Aristophanes pushes the limits of modesty in an effort to stress the importance of physical beauty and sexuality to these women, and of the artifices used to enhance these things. Lysistrata addresses another woman whom Lampito introduces as an honest woman from Corinth, and Lysistrata questions the honesty of Corinthians. Since she does not substantiate this

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[20](cont'd) 1988), p. 24.)

[21]Aristophanes draws our attention to potentially significant differences between Athens and Sparta, but he does not fully investigate this issue in *Lysistrata*. Consequently, any statements regarding the two regimes would have to be considered in light of the broader context of other examinations. Although this is beyond the scope of this commentary, relevant material from Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, etc. will be presented as appropriate.

accusation,[22] it is presumably a commonplace for an Athenian.

All of the participants are at last assembled: Lysistrata has been joined by her neighbor Calonice; the women from Anagrya who are represented by Myrrhine; Lampito who represents Sparta; there is a woman from Boeotia, and a woman from Corinth. Lysistrata greeted Calonice, Myrrhine and Lampito by name, whereas she is apparently meeting the representatives from Boeotia and Corinth for the first time. Lysistrata, as the hostess and organizer, is not pleasant with Calonice and Myrrhine but quickly becomes more pleasant in welcoming the Spartan, Boeotian and Corinthian. In other words, Lysistrata is friendly to her country's enemies and unfriendly to her countrywomen and allies. Lysistrata calls her enemies from Sparta and Boeotia her friends, but does not extend this title to the woman from Corinth, or to Calonice or Myrrhine. Of course, this may simply be dictated by "politeness," that is, a concern for what is politically effective, or useful.

In summary, Aristophanes raises three main issues in this introduction which turn out to be of importance throughout his *Lysistrata*. The first concerns women's natures. Are women licentious and lazy as Lysistrata argues? Are they tricky and sly as the men and Calonice argue? Is beauty and adornment an excessive preoccupation with women? Although one is tempted to generalize about the characteristics common to women, Aristophanes labours to show that women are not necessarily homogeneous. If Lysistrata is able to unite these women, however, there must be something that she appeals to which they will all identify with. This will be her challenge, whereas Aristophanes may be tacitly indicating a possible solution for uniting not just Greek women, but **all** the Greeks.

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[22]Lysistrata may be questioning the honesty of Corinthians because of what they said to the Spartans in 432 B.C. in order to convince them to enter the war against Athens. The Corinthians argued that the Athenians were imperialistic and unsatisfied with the status quo -- they were innovators, quick in forming resolutions and carrying them out, daring beyond their resources, risk-takers beyond their better judgement, and without hesitation. The Athenians were said to be always abroad and obtained everything as soon as they desired it. Conversely, the Spartans were said to be moderate and liked things as they were -- they never originated an idea, their actions fell short of their aims, they mistrusted their own judgements, and they hung back in order to avoid harming others. (Thucydides, I. 68-72, pp. 73-77.)

Correspondingly, what are characteristics of men, and how do they differ from women's? And what does this mean for their interrelationship? Out of this comes Aristophanes' second concern regarding the private and public roles of women and men. What is healthy for the household and the *polis*? Along with all of its other damage, the war appears to be creating tension between the two realms, the private and the public, a tension significant enough for Lysistrata to organize this revolt. Women are traditionally much more directly involved in the affairs of the household -- like taking care of husbands, servants and children -- than in the affairs of the city. How has the household been affected by the war? Will this be what unites the women together?

Also, since Lysistrata's purpose is not altogether clear, this may be treated as the poet's third important issue. Aristophanes portrays all of the women to be narrowly self-interested, except the leader Lysistrata. But it is not revealed why she, in particular, is so concerned to end the war, nor why she undertakes an action so out of traditional female character.[23] She does not seem to share the other women's motive for entering it (more sex-play, and general domestic bliss). How will she benefit individually, if at all? Admittedly, it will not be easy to determine the cause of Lysistrata's grand actions since the poet is almost completely silent about her, except for her name which has a combined meaning of a general/commander of an army and setting free/deliverance/power of releasing (ie.,

[23]In Henderson's extensive annotation of the play, Lysistrata's plan is also thought of as grand, but he does not question her private intentions. In his words: "The dialogue exploits the negative male stereotypes of wives which were then current and at the same time highlights Lysistrata's unique and superior character. Kalonice, forerunner of the other wives, is naive about realities outside the home and self-indulgently preoccupied with sex, fancy clothes, and wine. Lysistrata by contrast displays statesmanlike concern about the welfare of all Greeks and bold initiative in formulating a plan to extricate the combatants from the impasse of a stalemated war: admirable qualities conventionally associated with the male world. Kalonice's function, apart from making jokes, is to draw Lysistrata out, to elicit information and to express scepticism. Thus we are acquainted with Lysistrata's character, intentions, and situation before the arrival of the other wives brings about a fuller revelation of her plans. We wonder with Kalonice how Lysistrata plans to elevate the wives' thinking and to employ them in the salvation of Greece (a task which has proved impossible even for men), and we are perhaps reminded of the prologue of Sophocles' *Antigone*, where an extraordinary and strong-willed woman proposes a bold plan to the timid and conventional Ismene." (Jeffrey Henderson, pp. 65-66.)

"Liberating General"[24]), and, as we subsequently learn, that she was born with discriminating judgement and educated by her father and by the speeches of the old people of the city. Lysistrata does not indicate if these elders were male, female or both. Lysistrata **will** lead an army and **will** accomplish a task, but what exactly is her own private stake in the task at hand? Is it possible that she does not have a selfish interest, or at least an interest like the other women? Most male generals would be concerned about honour and glory, which she does not seem to be. Is Lysistrata an example of the kind of person who acts simply for the common good? As Aristophanes will show, Lysistrata's grand design is more urgent than the functions of the household, if only because the household is threatened by the war.

[24]*The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* defines Lysistrata's name to mean 'Dismisser of Armies,' which is slightly different from defining the two distinct parts, **lysis**; and **strata**. (Sir Paul Harvey, *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 253.)

III. Purpose, Strategy and Committal

Establishing some order over the situation, Lampito asks who has called together this council of women. Lysistrata identifies herself as the organizer, whereupon Lampito asks her to explain the purpose. It is curious that Lampito has travelled the long distance from Sparta to meet these women in Athens without knowing who the organizer is, or for what purpose this council has been assembled. There is no textual evidence that any of these women have been promised anything for attending. Have they decided to come out of curiosity? In any case, this indicates that Lysistrata has ensured that her purpose remained a secret until the council could consider it as a whole, rather than each member deliberating upon it individually or in smaller groups, with the likely consequence that its secrecy would be compromised. This strategy will require the council to work as a unified body, and the acceptance of the strategy will require the members to commit to it in a public forum.

Now that it has been made clear that everybody but Lysistrata is unaware of the purpose of this gathering, a partial defence of these women can be offered. Specifically, it seems unfair of Lysistrata to hurl accusations against these women for being uninterested in her cause when none of them know what the cause is. Lysistrata's impatience may be taken as a warning to the audience that it, too, must be cautious in its consideration of her judgement on women. Everything that Lysistrata says about women cannot unquestioningly be taken as the truth, even though she eventually claims that she tells only the simple truth. Attempting to piece together characteristics of the women (and men) will require an examination of all of what is said, as well as all of what is done.

Lysistrata is ready to explain the purpose of this gathering of women and says she will do so with pleasure. She asks the women whether they "feel sad and sorry because the fathers of [their] children are far away from [them] with the army?" Lysistrata guesses that none of these women have their husbands at home. This question is asked of these women first as mothers, and then as wives. Calonice, Myrrhine and Lampito explain that their husbands have been away for long periods of time. The war, not the household, **appears** to be their husbands' priority -- but they are, of course, defending all these households, whatever else.

None of the women mention what effect this absence is having on their children. In fact, they do not even mention their children -- they respond to Lysistrata as wives, and only Myrrhine will be shown as a mother during the entire course of the play. The major principle in support of unification, therefore, would seem to be that they are wives who are separated from their husbands.

Lysistrata laments that the war has also eliminated the supply of potential lovers, which had been the source of sexual gratification for the poor widows. Moreover, since "the day the Milesians betrayed [them, Lysistrata has] never once seen even an eight-inch-long *godemiche*, to be a leathern consolation to us poor widows...."[25] Lysistrata includes herself as one of the poor widows, who are apparently unified by their loss of private pleasure because of the war. As she has so directly reminded them, mothers, wives, and widows all have reason to be sad and sorry about the men being away in battle. Now Lysistrata asks if these women will support her if she has discovered a way to end the war. The purpose of this council is to end the war and have the men return home. Lysistrata appeals to the women's selfish interests rather than to a common good (such as Greece itself being slowly destroyed by the war). This is not to say that the common good has nothing to do with Lysistrata's concern that the husbands return home.

The three women who spoke of their husbands being away from home eagerly support Lysistrata, who now appeals to the group as sister women. Although Lysistrata had explained her purpose with pleasure, she warns that the strategy is much more difficult because the women will have to refrain from something not easily given up. Myrrhine is anxious for an answer and exclaims that the women will do it, even if it means death. There would seem to be no sacrifice greater than this, until Lysistrata finally explains that the women will have to refrain from the male organ altogether. The women are not anxious to comply with this request -- to say the least -- and they prepare to return home. Some of the women are overwhelmed, others have sad looks, and others are crying. This was not a strategy that had ever crossed their minds, and now that they have heard it, they are profoundly upset and

[25]My emphasis of "us."

disappointed. It is obvious that the women would not have assembled if they had known what was in store for them. In other words, Lysistrata's decision to keep this a secret was prudent. Myrrhine, the first to oppose vocally, admits she will not participate and is prepared to let the war continue. Lysistrata asks Calonice what her decision is, and reminds her of her earlier pledge to make extreme sacrifices. Calonice says she is prepared to do anything but refrain from the male organ. In her opinion, this is the sweetest thing in all the world; she would rather go through the fire. Myrrhine agrees. This refusal is not expressly because they doubt the success of the plan itself, but rather because they cannot endure the sacrifices. Calonice and Myrrhine cannot bear to think beyond their immediate sacrifice to the full consequences of the plan, if successful. They cannot forego short-term pleasure, even in the interest of their long-term pleasure. The common good will have to suffer if this is what is required.

These responses compel Lysistrata to make more public her thoughts about women, which she had previously stated to Calonice in private. Women are wanton and vicious, and deserve the treatment they receive at the hands of the poets. Interestingly, Lysistrata believes that women are fittingly the subject of tragedies, but Aristophanes has incorporated them into a comedy. Lysistrata judges that women seemingly are only suited for love and lewdness, which she implies is somehow tragic. Yet it is humorous to listen to women admit among themselves to their tremendous desire for sexual intercourse, a desire which they do not traditionally acknowledge, or at least admit to in public. What would be tragic is if women could end an unjust or unprofitable war, or a war that was destroying their cities, and yet they did not have the will-power to do so.

Lysistrata has only one remaining hope -- that the foreign women will enlist in her army. She refers to Lampito as "dear" and from "hardy Sparta," and pleads with her to join the cause. Lampito admits that this would be difficult by the goddesses Demeter and Persephone. Demeter is the goddess of the cornfield and presides over agriculture, while Persephone, Demeter's daughter, is the Queen of Tartarus who ascends to earth for nine (pregnant) months of the year. This mother and daughter represent life and death, respectively, both regeneration and degeneration, and Lampito identifies womanhood with this

complete cycle of life. Interestingly, she does not identify herself with the warlike virgins Athena and Artemis. She, at least, finally agrees that peace must come first. Lampito, then, is the first woman to give her consent to the plan, but she does not articulate an understanding of precisely how she thinks this strategy will work.

Lampito's consent pleases Lysistrata, who now refers to her Spartan ally as her dearest, best friend. Lysistrata exclaims that Lampito is "the only one deserving the name of woman." Lampito supports peace and is willing to refrain from the male organ altogether to obtain it. She is willing to sacrifice this pleasure to achieve a greater good for herself and for her community. In this, Lampito and Lysistrata are friends -- they are not only good for love and lewdness. One is left wondering, however, what their motive is. Generally, Lysistrata urged the women to forego immediate pleasure in the name of more future pleasure. But what about Lampito and Lysistrata herself? Are they motivated by some notion of common good other than future pleasure? One also wonders if Lampito is rightly to be called a "woman" in assuming this warlike stance. Women who refuse to participate in sexual intercourse also refuse to celebrate in the achievements of Demeter and Persephone. Are women, by nature, supposed to be warlike virgins, or deliverers of life? Certainly, the fully independent life is not possible for either men or women generally.

Curiously, Lysistrata excludes herself from the ones deserving the name woman, which further separates herself from her sex, or at least the part of her sex that she says she respects. Perhaps Lampito is the only woman so far who is willing to make the sacrifice. Lysistrata may not be making a sacrifice since she may not be giving up the male organ, or, alternatively, she may not desire it. Although Lysistrata talks about male lovers and their artifical substitutes, is she herself as sexually motivated as she would have the women assume? If she does not share this motivation, then what is hers, and is she truly an ally of the women?

These public praises of Lampito by Lysistrata have an immediate effect on the rest of the women. Specifically, Calonice asks the question she neglected to ask when she first agreed to support Lysistrata -- how exactly will peace be achieved if the women do as Lysistrata

says? It is not common sense to Calonice. Perhaps the "pretty flat-fish" wants to be among those deserving the name "woman." The bull-strangling Lampito is the only woman? Yet Lysistrata is adamant that by the fertility goddesses peace can be obtained. If the women dress beautifully and wait for their mates, the men will be wild to lie with them, and when refused, the men will hasten to make peace. In other words, the women have control over their mates through sex. The presumption is that males cannot control their sexual desires as successfully as women can, and they will be forced to comply with the women's wishes in order to satisfy them. Lysistrata must also believe that the men will make peace before either raping their women or seeking alternative means to satisfy their desires. There are some large assumptions lurking here.

Lampito agrees that the men will make peace under these conditions just as Menelaus threw away his sword when he saw Helen's naked bosom -- Helen had the power to create peace through sexual desire. However, the unspoken, and more famous power of Helen, is that of being able to create war.[26] The Trojan War began when Helen ran away with Paris, which compelled Menelaus and his fellows to launch a thousand ships in order to force Paris to return Helen from Troy. Hence, Helen can influence one man to lay down his weapons, but she can also precipitate a war between two whole nations. Lysistrata and Lampito recognize that with sufficient determination, they can bring their cities to peace. In so doing, the men of Athens and Sparta will not fight over one woman, but, rather, they will fight all of the women collectively for access to their respective wives.

Being very practical, Calonice raises three concerns. First, what if their husbands leave them? Second, what if the husbands drag them into the bedchambers by force? And lastly, what if the men beat them? Calonice does not acknowledge still other alternatives that the men have, including persuading other women to be their mates or purchasing prostitutes. Homosexuality, masturbation and bestiality are also not discussed in connection with men (though masturbation was alluded to in connection with women, and homosexuality is a prominent theme in other plays, such as the *Clouds*). Lysistrata responds to all of Calonice's

[26]Homer, *The Iliad*. Translated by Richmond Lattimore, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), Book 3, line 121, p. 103.

asked questions. First, if the husbands leave, then the women will resort to artificial means of sexual satisfaction. However, this does not adequately answer Calonice's concern. Specifically, how could society exist without men? Artificial male organs would not satisfy a woman's sexual desire, for if that were the case, they would not even be missing the men; masturbation for women is an inadequate substitute, and besides that, it would not satisfy society's need for regeneration. As well, where and to whom would the men go if **all** of the Greek women participated? But this merely raises the question: **would all** women share the wives' devotion to the issue? Certainly widows and young girls would have a lot to gain by **not** participating. And could the men just leave without any second thoughts or regrets? Are artificial substitutes adequate for men any more than for women? Are the sexual organs all that tie men and women together? And more to the point, will this stop the war? Calonice does not raise any of these concerns; again, she is satisfied without a full understanding of the issue.

As for the second point, Lysistrata advises that if her husband forces her into the bedroom, she is to hold on to the door posts and resist in all other ways. And third, if he starts to beat her, then yield to his wishes, but do so without pleasure. Lysistrata does not recommend that the women fight back because of the men's physical superiority. The women ought to succumb to the husband's wishes, and by not indicating any pleasure in the activity, the men will also not enjoy it. Lysistrata contends that there is no pleasure for the man if he has to do it by force, and anyway, there are a "thousand ways of tormenting" husbands which do not result in force -- ie., one can get one's revenge. This raises doubt about whether the majority of men would even resort to force. As Lysistrata says, men will "tire of the game" well before having to use force. Lysistrata may be correct, but one wonders about her belief that "there's no satisfaction for a man, unless the woman shares it." What about rapists or men who purchase the services of prostitutes? The first kind of man does not care if the woman enjoys it, and may even prefer it if she hates it. The second kind of man also certainly cares less about the woman's enjoyment than he does his own.

Nevertheless, this rationale satisfies Calonice, and she gives the consent of the remaining women. How Calonice became the spokeswoman for the rest of the women is not

indicated, and noticeably quiet is Myrrhine, who had been rather adamant in her opposition to this strategy. The women no longer question the success of the plan, which means that either they are acting out of trust, or that Lysistrata's rationale is inherently persuasive, possibly because it is largely correct. Because the men will respond exactly as Lysistrata expects, it is more likely that there is some truth to her rationale. The key to this seems to be that the women know that they are dealing with civilized men who will not beat and rape them. The men will not like the position their wives have put them in, but they will not breach the moral contract of their relationship if the price is what they would regard as a barbarization of themselves. As well, the men will not leave them; they will try to resolve the conflict.

Lampito is also apprehensive because of the warlike frenzy of the Athenian populace (ie., not because of the "warlike" Sparta). Lampito believes that she and her troops will be able to persuade their Spartan husbands to conclude a fair and honest peace,[27] but such may not be true in Athens. Lysistrata attempts to calm Lampito's fears by arguing that the Athenian women will make their *demos* hear reason, but Lampito suspects this will be impossible. As long as the Athenians have their ships and treasures they will not end the hostilities. Essentially, she argues that although a sex strike will work in Sparta, it will not work in Athens since wealth is a complicating factor in the spirit of the Athenian populace.[28] Lysistrata agrees with Lampito that the sex strike will not be enough in Athens, and that this is why she plans to take control of the Acropolis. This task has been assigned to the older women of Athens who are already on their way to seize the citadel. How Lysistrata convinced

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[27]Lampito is the first woman to mention appropriate terms for peace. She does not indicate, however, what "fair and honest" mean to her, and Lysistrata does not pursue the issue at this time.

[28]"As Henderson points out, this draws our attention to the possibility of an earlier peace if it had not been for Athens' capacity for war. And now, the tables have turned: "The Spartans are ready to consider peace, but the Athenians have in their treasury and their fleet a military advantage that enables them to be stubborn. Here Aristophanes caters to Athenian pride and puts a rosier complexion on Athenian capabilities than was at that time justified in reality. The Peloponnesian fleet was now a match for the Athenian, and the Peloponnesians could now get money from the Persians, as Peisandros points out to the Athenians in assembly (Thukydides, 8, 52-3). Nevertheless, at the time of the performance of *Lysistrata* many (perhaps most) spectators preferred to look on the bright side of their situation, and Thukydides' informants clearly exaggerated the ease with which Peisandros silenced those who spoke against his proffered plan (8, 53, 2)." (Jeffrey Henderson, p. 88.)

these older women to cooperate is not revealed. What would **their** self interest be in this *coup d'etat*? Lampito agrees with Lysistrata that taking control of the Acropolis is for the best. In this, Lysistrata has proven her ability to organize and command troops, as well as understand and implement the necessary tactics. In this she has earned her name of general.

To bind these women together in this common cause, Lysistrata recommends that they swear to an inviolable oath. Lampito agrees and indicates that the women will swear to whatever terms Lysistrata lays down. Lysistrata is prepared to assume this leading role, and organizes the sacrifice of a sheep. She prepares to take an oath as men would, an oath sworn to Ares. Ares, the God of War, loves battle for its own sake. Although these women are going to wage a war, they are different from Ares since they are doing it to obtain peace, not because they love war itself. Nevertheless, Lysistrata believes that the oath must be one which prepares the women for war. Calonice disagrees with Lysistrata and argues for an oath more suitable to peace. Lysistrata thus seems more warlike than Calonice; none of the foreign women had objected to Ares, which distinguishes Lysistrata from the more peace-loving Athenian women. Calonice's suggestion is to sacrifice a white horse and swear upon its entrails, but Lysistrata doubts that they will find such a beast. They finally agree to sacrifice some Thrasian wine, which pleases Lampito greatly. Wine, the liquid of Dionysus, was initially criticized for promoting licentiousness in the women, and is ironically now being used to solidify their effort to end the war through continence. Incontinence precedes continence as war precedes peace. One wonders which are the more permanent or lasting conditions.

Lysistrata calls upon the goddess Persuasion to be supportive of the women's efforts. Eager to drink the wine, Calonice disputes Lysistrata's offer to be the first to take the oath. Swearing by Aphrodite, Calonice thinks the women should decide by lot, ie., the Athenian (democratic) way. In referring to this insatiable goddess, Calonice raises doubt that the women will be able to control their own sexual desires. Lysistrata acknowledges that Calonice shall be the first to take the oath, and indicates that the remaining women must all swear and pledge themselves to the same promises afterwards. That is, Lysistrata does **not** organize a lottery. Her "compromise" solution preserves **her** leadership -- **she** chooses. As well,

Lysistrata is determined to hear that these women will comply with its terms, regardless of whether they swear upon a sheep, horse or cask of wine. Lysistrata must be able to trust her army, and committing them to the terms of the agreement in public is the surest way of obtaining this.

The oath begins with a pledge to refuse sexual intercourse to both lovers and husbands. All men must receive the same treatment and they must not be allowed recourse to other women. As the oath progresses, however, Lysistrata talks only about the husbands, who are going to be the most important target. This may be true for these women, but what about the unmarried women, whether they be widows or young girls (which Lysistrata refers to later in complaining about the consequence of the war for women in general)? Would these latter women be as committed to this cause? What, if anything, has Lysistrata done to prepare for the possibility of factions within the tribe of women? In actuality, Aristophanes seems to neglect these potential problems. As events unfold, the unmarried women do not threaten the success of the movement, and yet no explicit reason is given for this. This mirrors the poet's disregard of sexual substitutes for the men. Aristophanes limits these people to moral kinds of behaviour -- unmarried women will not have sex with men (married or unmarried), and men will not have sex with anyone except their wives. This morality contributes to the success of the women's movement, and more generally, is Aristophanes' proposed code of conduct for a healthy (peaceful) marriage and city.

Calonice finishes the oath and Lysistrata asks the entire group if they are prepared to swear to her terms. Myrrhine is the first woman to reply in the affirmative, but none of the other women get a chance to bind their friendship together. Cries are heard in the distance, and Lysistrata explains that the old women have seized the Acropolis. It is time for Lampito to return to Sparta and organize her troops. The remaining foreign women will remain as hostages under the command of Lysistrata. Thus, Lysistrata is guaranteed complete compliance by keeping the Spartan, Corinthian and Boeotian women captive (ie., away from their households and husbands), and the foreign men will have to come to Athens if they want their wives. Calonice is concerned that the men will march against them, but Lysistrata

is confident the women can equal their force. This scene ends with Calonice swearing by Aphrodite once again, and calling for the women to maintain their reputations for obstinacy and spite.

In this section of the play, wherein Lysistrata outlines her purpose and strategy, she illuminates the dynamics of successful political decision-making. She appeals to the women's similar long-term selfish interests, but when this fails because of more immediate selfish interests, she turns her attention to an individual who does have the will-power to pursue the greater, long-term good. Lysistrata is fortunate to have Lampito as an ally. By using Lampito as an example of the kind of woman the rest of the women ought to emulate, other women then start to consider the possibility of enlisting. The women do not want to be blamed for prolonging the war -- for this they would feel guilty. They also do not want to be left out of a potentially successful exercise. Aphrodite, a jealous goddess, is sworn to by Calonice more than once; Calonice would be jealous if others of her sex were more womanly than herself, and they were able to accomplish a great task as a result. In sum, Lysistrata cements the friendship by more than just common sense. She understands women well enough to bind them together in a common cause, without compromising her leadership or tactics. She chooses the method of oath-taking, and she subtly makes the women comply to new terms. The women were expecting to flaunt their beauty in the household, but, instead, they are quickly organized for military service on the Acropolis.

An important issue implicit in this section is the respective abilities of males and females to refrain from sexual intercourse. Lysistrata and her assembled troops presume that women are able to abstain, while men are not, but Aristophanes clearly shows that it is also not easy for most women. One is left with the impression that Calonice would not cope for even one day without sex. Nevertheless, sexual intercourse is depicted as more of a physical activity for males than for females: as Lysistrata bluntly points out, all men reveal their sexual desire in a more visibly physical manner than women. The success of this plan will require that the men's tools stand like mad, resulting in them being wild to appease their desire. The unspoken aspect of this relationship is that these tools must stand to attention to

engage in the activity at all. In other words, a most physical condition is **required** of the male. How, if at all, these physical differences impact upon the interrelationship between the men and women will remain an interesting question throughout *Lysistrata*.

Lysistrata expects this womanly power to result in peace amongst the Greeks. Denying sexual intercourse, or at least pleasurable intercourse, is expected to bring the men to their knees and force them to negotiate terms for peace. The means and ends are exactly opposite for the women and men; the women will deny sex for peace, and the men will make peace for sex. What the sexes have in common is that they want their mates at home. Yet one wonders if the women's enterprise is an exaggeration of a point. Less shocking would be a woman denying intercourse to her husband over a disagreement about, for example, where to spend the annual holiday -- and then to no one's surprise getting what she wants. But to get peace? War and peace are very important issues for men, or at least this is what Aristophanes would have the reader believe so far. Certainly, this sex revolt is not enough to stop the Athenian men (as opposed to the Spartan men) from wanting to fight. An important question, then, is what is Aristophanes proposing for Greece? What is in common amongst the Greeks to be able to end the war? These women see the household being disrupted, and perhaps analogous to this, is the potential for Greece being disrupted by an even larger external factor such as the Persians.

At this point in *Lysistrata*, however, it is not guaranteed that peace will be negotiated in the manner which these women propose. There are at least five potential obstacles including: the inability of the women to remain continent; the widows and young unmarried women not sharing the same goals as these wives; the women not being able to defeat the men at the Acropolis; the husbands not falling to their knees to appease their wives; and the Spartan women being mistaken about their own city's warlike temperament. After these first two scenes of *Lysistrata*, only one thing is certain -- that Aristophanes has created great anticipation for the meeting of the women and men.

IV. Men, Women and their Laws

The beginning of this scene is consistent with the previous scenes in that it also commences with a hurling of complaints. At the start of the play Lysistrata had complained about the nature of women, and then when Lysistrata began to outline her strategy, she elicited complaints by the women about not having their husbands at home. Now, the Chorus of Old Men arrives complaining about the injuries they are suffering due to the seizure of the Acropolis by the women. They complain about chafed shoulders and the smoke from their burning faggots. These men are physically less able to fight than they used to be. The old men are amazed at "What unlooked-for things do happen, to be sure, in a long life!" Who would ever have thought that the women would seize the Acropolis, in effect ousting the men from power, and forcing them to retaliate!?

Is it because of the war that everyone is complaining? Or do human beings have a tendency to observe the harshness of life rather than its good, and thus to complain regardless? None of these people have any difficulty identifying the cause of their pains, or rather, what they consider to be an injustice done to them. It is not right that: the women initially do not share Lysistrata's zeal; the women's husbands are away from home; and the women have seized the Acropolis. At the start of the next scene, the Chorus of Old Men will also complain that this women's movement is another attempt to establish tyranny, which in their opinion is also not right. These perceived injustices are from particular points of view, which may be an indication of how most people view justice (ie., with a partisan bias). This question is not explicitly explored by Aristophanes in *Lysistrata*, but it arises in its context. Aristophanes' ideas about justice may be discovered by considering how the play ends. Namely, most of these perceived injustices are (temporarily) resolved at the end of the play: the end of the war brings the warriors back home; the old men no longer have to defend the city; and the women return to their households. The war is an important contributor to the complaints. But beneath the war is human nature, or rather male human nature and female human nature, and nothing is changed about that.

Eager to express their male perspective, the old men are surprised by this female action after having supported the women for their entire lives. The men are being challenged and treated with disrespec., rather than rewarded or taken care of. In the good-old-days, the women would not have dared to seize and occupy the Acropolis. Yet what about the traditionally important role of the women in the household? The men would have the audience believe that everything has been handed to the women on silver platters -- and that women do not have any household chores worth acknowledging. Are they perhaps right? How important are these household duties considering that even the women do not speak about them, except for Calonice's brief explanation at the start of the play and as false excuses later for leaving the Acropolis to be with their husbands? It would appear that the issue at least for these **younger** women is that the men are not at home, not that their own work is undervalued.

Although these men are old, they profess themselves ready to fight. The women are "vile conspiratresses" and deserve to be burned, with Lycon's wife burned first. Aristophanes does not indicate who this woman is, and importantly, the men do not single out Lysistrata. The men call upon Demeter to support their cause, yet this gentle female goddess traditionally supports the causes of women. Lampito has already solicited Demeter's assistance. The old men's threats to burn the vile conspiratresses would remind the audience of Erysichthon's threats against Demeter when she disguised herself as Nicippe, priestess of the grove.[9] When he threatened Demeter with his axe, Erysichthon was condemned to suffer perpetual hunger however much he ate. Eventually, he became a street beggar and ate filth. Ironically, Lysistrata's plan is also to starve the men, this time into submission.

The Chorus of Old Men repeat their amazement that the women would have the audacity to seize the Acropolis. In their opinion, the women are enemies of Euripides and all the gods,[10] yet in *Lysistrata* the only overt enemies that the women have are these old men

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[9]Robert Graves, "Demeter's Nature and Deeds," in *The Greek Myths: 1*, (Markham: Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1988), p. 89.

[10]Aristophanes devotes an entire play to the tension between the women and Euripides. In *The Thesmophoriazusai*, the women of Athens assemble to pass judgement on Euripides for writing tragic plays and revealing ill thoughts about

and the city's Magistrate. The battle lines have been drawn because of the extraordinary disrespect that the women have shown, which is difficult for the old men to accept considering that they have saved their women from Spartan and Persian invaders in the past.[31] The point of this being that the men have traditionally defended the city, and they have done it well. In fact, the younger men continue to do so. Men have always been educated for possible military service, and they were taught to respect their ancestors' contributions. Would the women prefer to be overrun by Spartans or Persians? To preserve the city, must not the men be prepared to defend it?

Nearing the top of the Acropolis, the Chorus of Old Men end their review of traditionally proper roles for men and women in the *polis*, and revert to the discussion of their aches and pains. The Chorus of Women[32] enters wondering if a conflagration has been "raised by these accursed old men and their pitiless laws." This Chorus is also upset: these women have been rushing to assist the women on the Acropolis but were delayed at the fountain where "Servants and slave-girls pushed and thronged [them]." The women had planned to fill their vessels with water before they heard of the old men's strategy, which also may be an indication of Lysistrata's foresight. Although both Choruses are purely dramatic devices in the play, the Chorus of Women makes one wonder: do not elderly, free-born women have any authority over servants and slave-girls such that they could have filled their water vessels first? These women say that they are free-born dames, yet in Athens they do not seem to command respect from slaves.[33]

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[30](cont'd) women. Essentially, Euripides has educated the men about women's tricks, which renders the women less powerful. The men no longer trust the women in regard to their fidelity or honesty. This issue, however, is beyond the scope of this commentary since it would require an extensive analysis of *The Thesmosphoriazusai* and Euripides' plays.

[31]Obviously it has not been these men who have fought in both wars for they would be over one hundred years old. These boasts are for the men of Athens of all time.

[32]While Aristophanes characterizes the men as old (**Chorus Geronton**), he does not do so with the women: Lysistrata and her colleagues are in their prime, whereas the women's **chorus** is not made up of **old** women, but merely elderly ones (**Presbutatais**). This may give the women their advantage in the skirmishes which follow.

[33]Refer to the *Republic*, 563b.

The Choruses of Old Men and Women meet each other just as a woman is seized by the men. The ensuing conversation is laced with insults and threats coming from both contingents. The women call the men wretched and old, and question the men's honesty and piety. Instead of responding to these charges the men mock their enemy, whereupon the Chorus of Women informs them that they "do not see the ten-thousandth part of [their] sex." The old men threaten to stop their cackling by breaking a stick across their backs and knocking out their teeth. The first threat by the women is much more vicious than any the men have thought of: "I will snap off your testicles like a bitch." The men ask what will happen if they batter them to pieces with their fists, and the women say they will "tear out [their] lungs and entrails with [their] teeth." The women's threatened tactics in war are much more nasty and terrifying than the old men's; while the latter threaten to use sticks and their fists, the women say they will use their teeth to bite off vital organs. The old men agree with the "clever poet" Euripides that women are the most shameless animals.

Amidst this action, additional insults are hurled, and the old men insist that they do not know what is preventing them from roasting the women with their torches. None of their threats are acted upon -- they try to use words to silence their enemy instead of sticks, fists or torches. This is an entirely new kind of enemy for them, which is not surprising considering that most civilized men (ie., gentlemen) do not beat their wives. Men are tacitly aware of their physical superiority over women, but in decent regimes are educated from childhood not to abuse this power. For such men to start striking the women, they would have to discard their lifelong educations in favour of a system more akin to a state of nature where physical force dictates.

The climax of this brief skirmish occurs immediately after the women call themselves free and the men threaten to make them hold their tongues. The women mock this threat and proclaim in turn that men "shall never sit more amongst the heliasts." When the men threaten to burn off the women's hair, they are drenched. This extinguishes their fire, but it is a far cry from biting off their testicles or gouging out their lungs and entrails. When finally driven to act (as opposed to making verbal threats), the women only do what they have to. It is

unlikely that the Chorus of Women is serious in establishing an official gynaecocracy since a permanent revolution is not part of Lysistrata's plan. Yet, in order for Lysistrata to convince these women to participate, she must have made an appeal to their specific interest. Although Aristophanes does not show Lysistrata convincing these women to participate, one discovers in what they say a possible explanation for their willingness to take part. Specifically, the Chorus does not talk about erotic desires like the younger women, but rather, as free women they criticize the pitiless laws of Athens. They also accuse the men of impiety. In other words, the Chorus of Women are concerned about two important ways in which women educate their young -- the laws and religion. These women appear to have a more explicitly political interest than the younger women.

Now a Magistrate enters as the Chorus of Old Men tremble with cold, having just had their fire literally and figuratively extinguished by the water of the Chorus of Women. The entrance of this new participant, who interprets and enforces the laws of the city, occurs again with complaints. Resembling the old men, and Lysistrata, the Magistrate complains about the nature of women. Women, he says, clamor their tambourines and weep over Adonis. The Magistrate recalls a recent speech by Demostratus where he argued in favour of sending troops to Sicily, and instead of supporting her husband, "his wife, more than half drunk, was screaming on the house-top: 'Weep, weep for Adonis!'" This suggests that at least some women did not fully support the Sicilian expedition, and it seems that the Magistrate regards this as blameworthy. But given its disastrous outcome, it is far from clear that their opposition was not justified. He asks them if they are ashamed of their wild and uproarious doings.

The women are silent regarding this accusation, and the old men are quick to respond: the lack of support women give to war is coupled with abuse and insults. The women have soused us with water! The Magistrate explains that men must share the blame for the ill conduct of women since men "teach them to love riot and dissoluteness and sow the seeds of wickedness in their hearts." Husbands ask jewellers to visit their wives at night while they are off fighting in war, and great, strong cobblers with great, long tools are asked to

attend the wives in midday. The Magistrate blames the men for promoting infidelity through either carelessness or stupidity. He does not explicitly place the blame on women for their love of luxury, or on the men for indulging their wives in it. The problem is that women are encouraged to break their marriage oaths, and this has now resulted in the Magistrate not being able to pay his rowers (the Acropolis and the public treasure stored there having been seized). In agreement with the Chorus of Women, the Magistrate also sees a problem with the system of education.

But how is infidelity related to this current action on the part of the women? First, infidelity is not compatible with establishing a permanent and healthy household wherein children are raised to respect all of morality. In this, Rousseau's observations are most pertinent:

> It is up to the sex that nature has charged with the bearing of children to be responsible for them to the other sex. Doubtless it is not permitted to anyone to violate his faith, and every unfaithful husband who deprives his wife of the only reward of the austere duties of her sex is an unjust and barbarous man. But the unfaithful woman does more; she dissolves the family and breaks all the bonds of nature. In giving the man children which are not his, she betrays both. She joins perfidy to infidelity. **I have difficulty seeing what disorders and what crimes do not flow from this one.** If there is a frightful condition in the world, it is that of an unhappy father who, lacking confidence in his wife, does not dare to yield to the sweetest sentiments of his heart, who wonders, in embracing his child, whether he is embracing another's, the token of his dishonor, the plunderer of his own children's property. **What does the family become in such a situation if not a society of secret enemies who a guilty woman arms against one another in forcing them to feign mutual love?**[34]

The education of children is of great significance, not only for their own happiness, but also for the health of the city. These children are the city's future men, women, husbands, wives, fathers and mothers -- all of whom will be the future citizens. For better or worse, whatever people learn as children will be pretty much what they teach to their own children. The sexes depend on each other to remain faithful. If breaking **this** trust is acceptable, then so would the breaking of other trusts, some no less consequential. The household and the *polis* depend upon the maintenance of certain trusts -- if no one trusts anyone, then everyone is left to

[34]Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, Translated by Allan Bloom, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1979), Book V, p. 361. My emphasis.

their own resources, much as they would be in the state of nature.[35] Aristophanes is reminding us how important trust is, and how human beings react to breaches of trust. But also, the infidelity of women destroys mutual respect. Women do not respect the husbands they cuckold, nor do men respect wives who are whores.

Even though the women have stopped the Magistrate from obtaining funds, he will not accept defeat. He tries to solicit the assistance of his officers but finds them preoccupied. Before he can open the gates himself, his enemy presents herself and is prepared to negotiate. Lysistrata has overheard the conversation and wants to end any further violence. What she wants "is not bolts and bars and locks, but common sense." Immediately, the Magistrate wants Lysistrata tied up. He wants to use force, not common sense, which suggests that there may be good grounds for Lampito's concern about the Athenian *demos*. Lysistrata calls for the support of Artemis, and threatens the Magistrate's officer if he even touches her with the tip of his finger. This woman of common sense is not afraid to fight, and she will accept only a minimal amount of violence without resisting. The Magistrate is not afraid of Lysistrata, but finds that his men are. The women are violent warriors, or at least are so in speech, and the Magistrate is left to fight his own battle. He declares that he will stop all of this foolishness -- men will not "be bested by a mob of women." Once again, Lysistrata beckons the support of the holy goddesses, and warns the Magistrate that he will "have to make acquaintance with four companies of women, ready for the fray and well armed to boot." Lysistrata is confident that she has the unified support of all women, whether they are single, married, divorced or widowed. Although the question remains regarding how she has obtained

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[35]This is similar to what Laurence Berns says in his essay which outlines Hobbes' political teaching: "In other words, according to the next law of nature, men should perform their covenants. If this principle is not hold, society itself would dissolve. This principle, fidelity to contracts, according to Hobbes, is the basis of all justice and injustice; for where no covenant has preceded, no rights have been relinquished or transferred, and each man has a right to everything. Thus injustice, or injury, is nothing other than the non-performance of covenants, exercising a right that one has already legally relinquished. All genuine legislation then becomes a form of self-legislation, and injury is like a self-contradiction, willing to do that which one has already willed not to do. All duties and obligations to others derive from covenants." (Laurence Berns, "Thomas Hobbes," in *History of Political Philosophy*, Edited by Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, 2nd ed., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 376-7.)

this total support, there is no evidence in the play that she is incorrect in this. None of these companies of women will subvert her plan.

The Magistrate orders his troops forward, Lysistrata does the same, and even though the women are but vendors of produce and keepers of taverns and bakeries, they quickly score a victory. The men do not appear to have even fought with the women, or if they have, their agedness has proven to be a great disadvantage. Lysistrata is clearly the superior general, a fact which stuns the Magistrate. Echoing the Chorus of Women, Lysistrata points out that the Magistrate mistook them for slave-women and does "not know the ardour that fills the bosom of free born dames." The men have once again been defeated, but they are far from suing for peace. The Chorus of Old Men recommends that the Magistrate not make use of words, for words are of no use with wild beasts of this sort. When has he used words, apart from threats, to deal with the women? In fact, it is authority and force that so far have not worked, and words that now seem to be the only alternative.

The Chorus of Women responds to the old men by asking the question which the men should have asked the women at the beginning: "What would you have?" The men have not found out yet why the women have seized the Acropolis. They simply presume that it is to establish a gynaecocracy,[36] whereas the audience is aware of other intentions. The Chorus of Women tell the men that they made a mistake by laying rash hands on them, and if the men start to use force again, the women will knock their eyes out. Although the women prefer to stay at home politely, not hurting anybody and being lazy, they admit that they will act like wasps if their nests are disturbed.[37] Now that their authority and feeble force have been unsuccessful, they consider the possibility of finding out the reason for the women's actions. Specifically, what end do they have in mind? The old men encourage the Magistrate to

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[36]As Praxogora proposes in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*.

[37]The reader is drawn to Aristophanes' *Wasps* for an account of a wasp's nature. The Chorus of Wasps (ie., old men) are described as: prideful of their disciplined and courageous youth (as opposed to the present decadent generation); ill-tempered; and quick to anger when provoked. **The wasps are upset with the current legal system, whereby men who have not served in battle receive the same rewards and recognition as men who have.** By describing themselves as wasps, the older women in *Lysistrata* are also challenging the current policies of Athens, but perhaps in the name of older and better ways.

question the women for it would "be culpable negligence not to pierce the mystery, if [they] may." However, they advise the Magistrate to be cautious of the women and not to be too credulous. In other words, treat the women as wasps -- don't trust them. The difficulty that these men and women are having stems, ironically, from their lack of **verbal** intercourse. Sex is not the issue for these more mature people; rather, it is their inability and unwillingness to communicate with one another, with the men being primarily at fault.

The Magistrate accepts this advice and asks the women why they have barred the gates. Lysistrata answers on behalf of the women saying that their intention is to seize the treasury: "no more money, no more war." The end is to stop the war, and seizing the treasury is the means to this end. The Magistrate asks Lysistrata if money is the cause of the war, and she expands her answer to include all their troubles. For example, Pisander's revolutionary efforts were simply occasions to steal, as is the case with all political agitators.[11] Such agitators will not get another drachma out of the public purse now that the women are in control of it. Lysistrata is surprised that the Magistrate does not understand what the women are going to do, because to her, their intentions are quite evident -- the women are going to administer the treasury. He does not agree with Lysistrata that managing the treasury is similar to managing household budgets, and besides that, the "treasury supplies the expenses of the War." This is exactly Lysistrata's point -- no more war. But what about the safety of the city? When a city is forced to defend itself, a dependence on women would be a clear disadvantage because they are not as strong as men. True, this has not been the case in the recent skirmishes between the women and the old men and officers of the law, but then these men are not the warriors. Although the Magistrate questions Lysistrata about how the women plan to defend the city, she simply says that the women will do it and leaves the Magistrate wondering how.

The Magistrate's two questions are not irrevelant, especially if Lysistrata's proposal was intended for the long term. The treasury is more than a household budget because it does finance wars. If peace-loving women control the treasury, then Athens may indeed find itself

[11]Pisander led the revolutions which temporarily overthrew the democracy in 418, 412 and 411 B.C.

vulnerable to attack. Athens does not exist in isolation, for there are other cities that would want its treasury, land and people. The immediate concern is a perfect example, in that impairing the Athenian war effort will not stop that of the Spartans (or, for that matter, of the barbarians). Lysistrata does not address these issues because she is not proposing a permanent rule of women -- she, too, may recognize the basic defect of such.

Lysistrata says she will save the men, whether they like it or not, and the Magistrate exclaims that the women are impudent creatures: bold, shameless, and disrespectful. He knows of no conceivable way that the women could save the men. Yet if Lysistrata's plan can save the men, and the city, then it makes good sense for her to enforce it any way she can, and anyone not wanting to be saved must be ruled over like children who do not always know their own good. Although the Magistrate has said that he wants to learn the cause of the women's actions, he demonstrates that he is not open to there being any possible legitimacy to Lysistrata's plan. He not only criticizes her proposal, but what is more important, he is astounded that women would even concern themselves with issues of war and peace. One wonders whether he has ever given any thought to what women require. This certainly seems to be the first time that he has ever had to listen to a woman's perspective on these issues.[39] Before she can explain, however, the Magistrate lapses back into a mode of force. He threatens Lysistrata and admits that this is simply too much for him to bear. He loses his temper, but Lysistrata reminds him that he has more to fear by using force than she does. Although his instinct tells him to fight, he has already been defeated. Essentially, he has no choice but to listen to Lysistrata.

So, **finally**, Lysistrata is able to explain her purpose. The war has gone on for a long time, and throughout its duration the women have endured the men's actions in modest silence. The women have not allowed themselves to criticize, even though they have been

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[39]This is not to suggest that the male-female conflict is in any way new. As Charles Rowan Beye points out in his book *Ancient Greek Literature and Society*, men and women were often in conflict. Examples include: Creusa and Apollo in Euripides' *Ion*; Dejaneira and Heracles in Sophocles' *Trachinian Women*; Medea and Jason in Euripides' *Medea*; and Clytemnestra and Agamemnon in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Even Hera and Zeus had their difficulties. (Charles Rowan Beye, p. 108.)

aware of the problems after hearing the conversations of men in their households. The war has been a part of the household, and learning about the realities of the war has made the women sad. While the men have rationalized the war inside and out, it does not seem that they appreciate the extent to which the women also have felt its effects. The women did not reveal these feelings to the men, but would rather ask with a modest smile whether peace was voted for in that day's Assembly. In reply to this question, the women where told by their husbands to mind their own business and hold their tongues. Lysistrata admits that she would then say no more. Another woman interupts, however, and says that she would not have held her tongue. The Magistrate agrees that women should have behaved as Lysistrata did; this other disrepectful woman should have been reduced to silence by blows for speaking against men.

Before continuing with her explanation, Lysistrata distances herself from this woman's reaction by reaffirming that she would not contradict her husband's command. As she tells it, Lysistrata has always been respectful in the past, and she obviously regards it as important to make this clear to the Magistrate. Lysistrata has not always broken the unwritten laws of marriage and the *polis* (ie., the common assumptions on which the *polis* is based, especially regarding the respective business of men and women). In time, though, she witnessed more and more foolishness, and fatal foolishness at that. Instead of gently asking if peace had been voted for, Lysistrata would comment on the madness of the men's decisions. To this, she would receive the threat of a beating and be told to go weave her web. Her husband would tell her that "War is men's business!"; weaving webs is the business of women. It is not said whose business peace is, although the Magistrate would doubtless argue that the men secure peace through war. The Magistrate agrees with Lysistrata's husband that women have no place making decisions about war. Lysistrata calls the Magistrate a wretched man for thinking her husband spoke well, thereby calling her husband wretched as well.

Not letting the women oppose their foolish decisions was bad enough, but what is worse is that now there are few men left in Athens: they are either temporarily or permanently gone. This prompted the women "to make common cause to save Greece."

Lysistrata advises the Magistrate to listen to their wise counsels which **may** put things on a better footing. Yet the Magistrate is still unreceptive. Lysistrata is not making progress with either force **or** words. Thus far in the play, the women have complained about the absence of men only in relation to their own amorous natures, but now Lysistrata is identifying another related problem. Specifically, the absence of men in Athens has left the city to be governed by men like this Magistrate! As a result, Lysistrata has been able to seize the Acropolis, and other "agitators" could do the same. In other words, the city has been left unguarded because of the external emphasis of the war. Fortunately, Lysistrata's purpose protects the interests of Athens, and Greece, but other revolutionaries may not be so inclined. The business of peace and war do go together, and it would be pointless winning a war without having a city to return to.

Lysistrata's call that war become the business of women is supported by the Chorus of Women, who say they will steadfastly guard their friends and companions. According to the Chorus, nature has lavished women with five essential characteristics: virtue, grace, boldness, cleverness, and prudently-directed virtue in love-of-city (ie., "patriotism"). The Chorus asks the women to be like bundles of nettles. Nettles are plants with stingers, which metaphorically means to irritate or provoke someone by delivering small wounds to his pride. Consistent with this latter interpretation, the women are urged never to slacken their anger for "the winds of fortune blow [their] way." This speech of confidence inspires Lysistrata to focus on the amorous nature of women and its role in her strategy. War **shall** be the business of women, and their seductive charms will be their weapons: "If only we may stir so amorous a lust among the men that their tools stand stiff as sticks, we shall indeed deserve the name of peace-makers among the Greeks." The Chorus appears to be telling Lysistrata to forget these "greybeards" and concentrate on the young men, since nettling the old men is not accomplishing their task -- their pridefulness is not being broken. The men have suffered defeat and have been called old, but they are still unaccommodating. Pride does not appear to be Aristophanes' first concern, for if pride was the problem, then nettling **would** be the solution.

With the mention of amorous lust, the Magistrate is curious to know how the women intend to become peace-makers, and one senses that this is the first time that he has been genuinely interested. First, Lysistrata explains that men will not be allowed to run through the market like madmen holding lances. A woman comments that this will be something gained, but the Magistrate argues that this is how brave men are supposed to behave. Lysistrata suggests instead that it is a comical sight to see warriors buying fish in the market. This is another way that women are forced to live with men during war, and they view it as completely unrefined. A woman recalls a recent event where a phylarch rode on horseback through the market pouring soup that he had bought into his helmet. As well, a Thracian warrior had scared a good woman "into a perfect panic" while he ate all of her best fruit. There is no reference to this latter warrior even paying for the produce (it would hardly be the first -- or last -- time a soldier simply helped himself). Essentially, the laws that the older women depend on to do **their** business are no longer in force. In his silence, the Magistrate appears to consider this an inevitable consequence of war; not all of the civilized arrangements can be maintained during a war.

But exactly how are women planning to restore peace and order among the polities of Greece? Lysistrata says that it will be the easiest thing in the world, like what women do with yarn. As thread becomes tangled, the women pass the spool across and through the skein; to end the war, the women "shall send embassies hither and thither and everywhere, to disentangle matters" (ie., have verbal intercourse). The Magistrate calls the women silly for thinking that such a simple measure can appease so many bitter enemies, and surely he has a point. The women's solution presumes that common interests always outweigh special interests, and this is by no means obvious. According to Lysistrata, however, reason dictates that what women do with yarn, the men should always do in politics. The Magistrate does not understand this, and so Lysistrata outlines her four-step process. Essentially, Lysistrata has become the teacher of politics, while the Magistrate has become her student. The first step is to wash the yarn to eliminate the grease and filth (ie., determine who the bad citizens are, "the refuse of the city," and drive them out of the city). If the Magistrate were intelligent, he

would say that this requires something stronger than speech. Next, card the remaining citizens as they search for employments and offices. Third, bring the citizens to the same standard by throwing them all into the same basket (ie., mix everyone together whether they be aliens, allies or debtors to the state). And finally, find the ends of each colonial thread, bring them to the Athenian centre and wind them into one for the public to make a good, stout tunic. This process requires the proper cleansing of citizens so that they obtain the same standard. The colonies must also have the same standards or else the state -- the tunic -- will unravel.

Education appears to be the key in this process, although Lysistrata does not indicate how the city obtains good citizens, or expels bad ones, what good and bad citizens are, and how they will be recognized. While thread is easily washed, human beings have the ability to hide their grease and filth so as to fool the judge. Lysistrata also does not indicate who could do all this. This person **would** have to know what good and bad are, and then understand human nature to be able to see through appearances, which would entail a diligent study of human nature. Moreover, once human beings were categorized, the person would have to know how to assign employments and offices to appropriate people in the interest of the common good, however that common good is defined. The person would have to understand fully the process and the intended result. Is Lysistrata an example of this kind of person? Aristophanes does not actually have Lysistrata do all of this, so it is unclear whether or not she could, or whether she would want to. But whoever understands what is required must at least be considered for the role.

This metaphor, incidentally, anticipates how Plato's Eleatic stranger describes politics to the young Socrates. Producing a garment by weaving requires that the wool be separated first, and combined second. The former process is defined as wool-work, while the latter process is rightly called weaving: "When the department of the art of combination which belongs to wool-work constructs a web by the intertexture of woof with warp, we speak of the web as a whole as a woollen garment, and of the art which directs the process as weaving."[40] Soft and hard threads are combined to produce a glorious and noble product.

[40]Plato, *Statesman*, Translated by A.E. Taylor, (Folkstone & London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1971), 283a. Spoken by the Eleatic stranger.

Weaving is related to politics as follows:

> ELEATIC: Is there any science of combination which, if it can help it, will construct even the meanest of its products of bad material as well as good? **Is it not true universally of every science that, so far as it may, it discards the bad materials and retains the appropriate and good, whether they are alike or unlike? It is by working them into one whole that it fabricates a product of a single quality and form?**
>
> SOCRATES JUNIOR: Why, surely.
>
> ELEATIC: Then we may be sure that neither will true natural statesmanship ever, if she can avoid it, construct a city out of good men and bad alike. **Obviously she will put her subjects to a first test in their childish play, and next, when they have passed the test, hand them over to persons who can educate them, and serve as her subordinate ministers for that purpose, but reserving to herself the direction and superintendence of the work.** Just as the weaver's art attends the proceedings of carders and others who prepare the materials for her fabric with instruction and superintendence, and directs each group among them to produce the results she judges fitting for her own combinatory work.
>
> SOCRATES JUNIOR: Precisely.
>
> ELEATIC: **Now kingcraft, I believe, does the same with all lawful educators and fosterers of youth; she reserves for herself the function of superintendence, will permit no training to be given which does not produce a temperament fit to be worked into her fabric, but commands that education shall have that exclusive end.** Hence those who prove incapable of any share in the brave and the modest temper and the other dispositions which tend to virtue, but are driven by their native evil constitution to irreligion, violence, and crime, she expels by the punishment of death or exile, or visits with superlative infamy. ... While others, who grovel in gross stupidity and low-mindedness, she reduces to the status of slaves. ... As for the rest, those whose temperaments tend more to courage, and she looks on their hardness of disposition as material for her warp; others lean more to modesty, as though spun thick and soft, and--to keep up the image--supply the threads of the woof; these opposing tendencies she sets herself to bind or weave together, much in the following manner. ... She first unites the eternal part in their souls by a bond of its own kind,--I mean a divine one, and then the animal part by other merely human ties. ... When true and genuine convictions of honour, right, good and their contraries are in a soul and held with assurance, then, I say, we have a divine principle appearing in a thing only less than divine.[41]

Both Lysistrata and the Eleatic stranger propose that bad citizens be discarded, and that good citizens (ie., both soft and hard ones -- women and men? or peace-loving and war-loving ones?) be retained and woven into one whole. This process requires a proper education to

[41]Ibid., 308c - 309c, my emphases.

produce proper temperaments, during which the weaver is not uninvolved. The Eleatic stranger explains that this education is provided based on the nature of the children. In other words, children have a nature, and education should be directed to those with suitable kinds of souls. Yet many of the questions arising out of Lysistrata's metaphor remain questions for the Eleatic stranger, like how to distinguish good and bad and who would do so. What is common between the two accounts is that the responsibility is bestowed on women for educating the city's youth, at least in part. Both uses of the metaphor promote further thought by the reader as to the problems, and obviously Plato thought it useful enough to include in his own work.

The Magistrate does not question Lysistrata about the complications arising from applying the art of weaving to the art of politics. Instead, he rhetorically asks whether it is a sin and a shame to see women washing and winding the state, "women who have neither art nor part in the burdens of the War." According to Lysistrata, however -- and quite contrary to what most men might presume -- the war is a far heavier burden on women than on men, for, in the first place, women bear sons who have to fight far away from Athens -- sons who may not come home. The Magistrate does not wish to recall such sad and sorry memories, which reminds us that men also feel the effects of war. Nevertheless, the truth should not be ignored such that magistrates, and men generally, think women are divorced from war. Lysistrata's point suggests that it is harder to bear the deaths of those one loves than one's own death. She may be right. Also, wives are unable to enjoy the pleasures of love and capitalize on their youth and beauty -- they "are left to languish far from [their] husbands, who are all with the army," and girls grow old in lonely grief. Young girls have not even had the opportunity to mate, or as Rousseau describes it, they are being deprived of the only rewards of the austere duties of their sex. The Magistrate argues that men grow old, too, but Lysistrata maintains that it is not the same for men and women. Old men can marry young women, but if a woman "does not make hay while the sun shines, no one will afterwards have anything to say to her, and she spends her days consulting oracles, that never send her a husband." The Magistrate continues to assert his opinions about old men -- clearly indicating

a lack of sympathy for the women's perspective -- whereupon Lysistrata loses her patience. She stops him from speaking, tells him to go away and die, and along with two other women, she drenches him with water. The Magistrate says that he has been insulted and treated scurvily, but Lysistrata tells him that he is lucky to be alive and not on a boat with Charon on route to Hades. The scene ends with the disgraced Magistrate exiting to inform his colleagues of the actions of these insolent creatures.

The use of water as a weapon is a good starting point in an attempt to summarize this third scene in *Lysistrata*. In this scene, where the audience gets to see (old) men and women interact, Aristophanes more deeply uncovers the differences between the sexes and the conflicts arising from them. Water, as the women's weapon, metaphorically represents what they stand for. Yes, the women say that they will fight viciously, but in actuality they only drench the men with water. The female weapon -- water -- extinguishes the male weapon -- fire. Water is necessary for the growth and continued existence of virtually all life forms, and it is radically different from fire, which is a potentially destructive "element" to these forms of nature. Fire is naturally suggestive, not of natural, but of artificial power: the arts (ie., *technae*, "technology"). What follows from this metaphor, then, is that women are more concerned with creating and nurturing life than men are. This is supported by Lysistrata's reference to women bearing sons who may be killed in battle, sons who are killed by other men. It is also very important for a woman to make the most of her body in her childbearing years, or she will grow old alone and be unhappy. The men, however, are more concerned with their efforts on the battlefield. They have not initiated conversations about their children, and their family lives are discussed only as a result of the women disrupting the traditional order of the household and the *polis*. Consistent with Aristophanes' metaphor for women are their defensive military tactics; they threaten the men only after being threatened, but once threatened, the women do resemble wasps protecting their nest.

Although criticized at the start of the play, beauty is important to the women because it helps them satisfy their desire for a family. They do not want to consult oracles for the rest of their lives -- they want a husband and children. If they are beautiful, they have a greater

chance of attracting a man (men being men). It is also while they are most beautiful that they are fertile. This raises the question of what men want in women, and what women want in men. Thus far in the play, several characteristics have been identified, including beauty and fidelity in women (ie., the men certainly seem less interested in their family), and appreciation by both. The men expect to be respected for their courageous efforts in war -- they have protected the household and the city. As well, the women do manage the household, and perform necessary functions there and in the marketplace, whereby the needs of life are met.

Complicating this analysis are the differences between Athenians and Spartans, especially with respect to what women want in men, and consequently, what men are more apt to want to be themselves. Plutarch observes that the Spartan women expect their husbands and sons to be courageous warriors: regarding Gyrtias, Plutarch writes "When a messenger came from Crete to report Acrotatus' death she said: 'Wasn't it inevitable that, when he proceeded against the enemy, either he would be killed by them or he would kill them? To hear that he died in a fashion worthy of me and the city and his ancestors is pleasanter than if he were immortal but a coward!'"; and describing an unnamed woman, Plutarch writes: "As a woman was burying her son, a worthless old crone came up to her and said: 'You poor woman, what a misfortune!' 'No, by the two gods, a piece of good fortune,' she replied, 'because I bore him so that he might die for Sparta, and that is what has happened, as I wished.'"[42] In contrast, the Athenian women do not want their husbands and sons killed in war; they are not prideful, or at least no longer prideful, of raising sons for war. Which attitude is more fitting? Should a city nurture its sons for war or peace? Is moderation possible and desirable? Not preparing for war leaves the city vulnerable to attack, while fanatic preparedness could lead the city to constant warfare, which itself could be disastrous. Whichever way the city chooses to exist, however, the importance of having the women's support is made clear. Women must also be educated so that they can nurture their own children for the continued common good of the city.

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[42]Plutarch, *Plutarch on Sparta*, pp. 159-60.

From the older Athenian women's viewpoint, the Chorus of Women admits that although their "delight is to stay at home as coy as a young maid, without hurting anybody or moving any more than a milestone," they can no longer tolerate the pitiless laws and decisions of the men. The women are **not** stupid and they **do** have a right to contribute, not only to the running of the household, but also somehow to managing the city. The war has affected the women's world as deeply -- if not more so -- than it has the men's, because the city's fate has effects on the household. The women can no longer sell (or buy) products in the market peacefully (a symbolic reminder of the importance of everyday economic life), and all they hear about at home are conversations about the war, conversations in which they are not entitled to participate. The men are intolerant of other views, as demonstrated by the Magistrate rejecting Lysistrata's reasonable advice, and the war has taken their husbands and sons away from them, forcing them to live in the company of only other women. Young girls are getting older, unable to experience the joys of love and motherhood, and women are becoming widows. Why should women continue to raise their sons to fight in a war that they do not support, and raise their daughters for a life of misery? These views may not be the peak of political wisdom, but neither are they irrelevant concerns, and a truly wise policy must take them into account.

This third scene is much more exciting than the two previous scenes. It was necessary for Aristophanes to reveal the strategy and have Lysistrata gain the support of the women, but the tension between the sexes is brought more fully to the surface once the men and women actually meet -- or, more precisely, the tension between the women and the old men. Aristophanes has yet to show the reactions of the younger men, the warriors, to the intrusions of women into their traditional roles. The old men and the Magistrate have reacted unfavourably to the women barring the gates of the public treasury; how will the young men react to the women barring the gates to their private treasure?

V. The Audacity of a Poet: Indecency & Immorality

The Chorus of Old Men complain about the possibility of another tyranny, and call upon their friends of freedom to awaken and aid them in an effort to destroy the women's movement. They continue to believe that the women want political change, even though Lysistrata has called upon **Aphrodite** to help them become peace-makers. Any political action by women seems to be tyrannical.[43] The old men do not understand the women's strategy as it pertains to the younger men, which is understandable since the women have concentrated their efforts on the older men due to the absence of their younger opponents. As well, the women have just insulted one of the city's magistrates and treated him like a corpse. Metaphorically, the women **have** murdered the current interpretation of the city's laws, and the men are about to learn that the women **are** conspirators in their partnership with the Spartans -- an enemy which the men trust no more than a pack of famished wolves. The men ask if it is a sin and a shame for the women to advise the men, to talk nonsensically of shields and lances, and to align themselves with the Spartans? The old men will not submit to this tyranny; they will carry daggers and fight the tyrants as Aristogiton did.

This remembrance of Aristogiton is different from Thucydides' account. In describing the revolt against the tyrants Hippias and Hipparchus, Thucydides (himself an Athenian) admits that most Athenians remember the story incorrectly, and he will "show that the

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[43]More generally, any political action in Athens at this time was labelled tyrannical. Thycydides describes the time following Hippias' exile as follows: "These events had impressed themselves on the people of Athens and, recalling everything that they had heard about them, they were now in an angry and suspicious mood with regard to those who had been accused in connection with the mysteries; everything that had happened was, they thought, part of a plot aiming at setting up an oligarchy or a dictatorship. With public opinion inflamed as it was, there were already a number of worthy citizens in prison and there was no sign of things getting any easier; in fact every day showed an increase in savagery and led to more arrests being made."(*History of the Peloponnesian War*, VI.60, page 447.) Aristophanes also points these fears out in the *Wasps* when Bdelycleon exclaims "Whatever issue is discussed, be is small or great, Of tyranny and conspiracy incessantly you prate. Never before have these words been heard, not for half a century; Like herrings in the market stalls, now they're common currency. If a trout is what you're after and refuse to purchase anchovy, Grumbles the disgrunted anchovite, *The gourmet favours tyranny.* If an onion you wish to buy, for your fish a savory, The offended cabbage seller cries, *Aha, you favour tyranny.*"(Aristophanes, *Wasps*, Translated by Moses Hadas, in *The Complete Plays of Aristophanes*, (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1984) p. 157.)

Athenians themselves are no better than other people at producing accurate information about their own dictators and the facts of their own history."[44] According to Thucydides, Aristogiton and the beautiful, young Harmodius (who "was loved and possessed by Aristogiton"[45]) plotted to murder Hippias and Hipparchus because the latter insulted Harmodius' sister. This insult occurred after Harmodius refused to become Hipparchus' lover. The two conspirators convinced a few other men to revolt against the tyrants on the day of the Panathenaea, but when Aristogiton and Harmodius suspected that their plan had been revealed to Hippias, they rushed upon Hipparchus and murdered him. Aristogiton and Harmodius were then killed, and Hippias murdered many other men who he thought were part of the conspiracy. Hippias' dictatorship, which Thucydides had thought was one of high principles and intelligence, became very oppressive and Hippias was forced to leave Athens four years later. Thucydides' point in this explanation is that Aristogiton murdered out of love and Harmodius murdered out of wounded pride. Neither man murdered out of a desire to restore freedom and democracy, though that is what the Athenian *demos* fondly remember them for. Aristophanes makes no attempt to dispel this misconception since the truth does not matter in the context of this play. The audience knows exactly what the Chorus of Old Men mean -- by aligning themselves with Aristogiton, the old men are willing to challenge any tyrants and will fight to restore freedom and democracy.

Aristophanes himself, however, appears to understand that the Athenians remember the account incorrectly, since Lysistrata will remind the Athenians about the Spartan involvement in exiling Hippias. Hence, Aristophanes may have an ironic intention in presenting this story. First, attempting to oust one leader or dictator does not automatically guarantee that a better regime will be formed. A rule of high principles and intelligence was destroyed because of one man's love and another man's pride. Both men took vengeance for personal injuries. One wonders if these feelings justify either the killing of another man or the destruction of a government. The powers of *eros* and pride are perhaps the real tyrants in

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[44]Thucydides, VI. 54, p. 443. Thucydides would not want us to forget that he too is an Athenian.
[45]Ibid., p. 443.

the souls of human beings. *Eros* and pride were strong enough to rule Aristogiton and Harmodius; neither man was able to control their own inner battle. And these are individuals that the Athenian *demos* reveres.

The men say they will break the women's teeth, and again, the women respond with harsher threats. If the men even "play [being] brave" the women will ensure that not even their mothers will recognize them. Yet the women are not really interested in doing this; it is this kind of behaviour that the women want to put an end to. Echoing Lysistrata, they want the old men to listen to them, for they have "useful counsel" to offer Athens. The women were raised to serve Athena and Artemis, and have had the privilege of participating in festivals of the city. Because of these "brilliant distinctions," the women think the Athenians deserve to hear what they have to say. Why should it matter that they are women? If women do have the cure, then should not they prescribe the medicine and the medicine be taken? The men would be irrational in not taking the medicine. However, doctors of medicine are respected for their judgements, while women are not! Yet the women assert that they have benefitted from the city, and feel an obligation to return some advice to it. In addition, they provide the state with more men to fight wars, which gives them a right to contribute to policy. Conversely, the women think that the men pay nothing for their right to govern the city, and worse than this, that men waste the treasuries and endanger the women's lives and liberties by making mistakes. Yet as the men would insist, they **have** paid for their right to govern -- they have defended Athens. The women are minimizing the price men pay in defending their city, in that the loss of a husband or a son in war seems to be more costly than the loss of the life itself. The women ask the men if they have "one word to say for [themselves]", and they do not hear the "sorry" which is presumably being asked for.

As much as one wants to sympathize with these women, their rationale for having rights to govern the city is weak. Being raised to serve Athena and Artemis in religious festivals does not mean that they are prepared to rule. Childbearing also does not prepare women for making decisions with respect to domestic and foreign politics, even though it generates a concern for the city's well-being. Concern is not competence. The Chorus of

Women is differentiated from their own leader, who admits to having given this issue a great deal of **thought**, and articulates an **understanding** of politics. The Chorus say they have useful counsel to offer, but not because they have thought the problems through. They are not like doctors of medicine who have been educated to prescribe cures for illnesses -- they have not been educated to rule. Lysistrata, however, will admit to having had a special kind of education. Lysistrata's leadership and counsel is based on intelligence and knowledge, not on her womanness. The older women appear to be confusing their duties and service with what their rights are. They do deserve good governors to ensure that good laws are made and followed to protect the household, and they deserve to be respected for bearing and nurturing children, while maintaining the household. Their duties are connected with this since, by the very nature of their sex, they are given the responsibility for childbirth.

The old men repeat their belief that the women are being absolutely outrageous, and prepare to punish the women by taking off their tunics. They want to be young again so that they can demonstrate the courage they had in earlier days and "savour of manhood." If they let the women have even the least hold over them, it will be all over because the women's "audacity will know no bounds!" The women will become builders of ships, fighters at sea, and cavalry officers. The women will resemble Queen Artemisia or the Amazons. The women have mortal, legendary and divine sources of inspiration. The men no longer doubt the ability of women to fight against men. In this least realistic aspect of the overall confrontation, the men have begun to take the women seriously, although they are not prepared to surrender. They threaten to fit collars around the women's necks, treating them as if they were dogs or slaves.

In wanting to be young and courageous again, the old men identify with their prime. They remember the good-old-days when they could fight in wars and display acts of courage. This time has passed, for now it would seem they cannot even defeat an army of women. In their act of disrobing to savour of manhood, they visibly remind the audience that they are no longer in their bodily prime. This is also one of the first issues raised by Plato in the *Republic*. After admitting to Socrates that he lacks the power to make the trip to town easily to talk

with Socrates, Cephalus describes the conversations of old men as follows:

> Now then, when they meet, most of the members of our group lament, longing for the pleasures of youth and reminiscing about sex, about drinking bouts and feasts and all that goes with things of that sort; they take it hard as though they were deprived of something very important and had then lived well but are now not even alive. Some also bewail the abuse that old age receives from relatives, and in this key they sing a refrain about all the evils old age has caused them. But Socrates, in my opinion these men do not put their fingers on the cause. For, if this were the cause, I too would have suffered these same things insofar as they depend on old age and so would everyone else who has come to this point in life. But as it is, I have encountered others for whom it was not so, especially Sophocles. I was once present when the poet was asked by someone, 'Sophocles, how are you in sex? Can you still have intercourse with a woman?' 'Silence, man,' he said. 'Most joyfully did I escape it, as though I had run away from a sort of frenzied and savage master.' I thought at the time that he had spoken well and I still do. **For, in every way, old age brings great peace and freedom from such things. When the desires cease to strain and finally relax, then what Sophocles says comes to pass in every way; it is possible to be rid of very many mad masters.**[46]

The Chorus of Old Men, like the majority of greybeards Cephalus speaks of, similarly laments for the pleasures of youth. Absent from *Lysistrata*, however, is the kind of treatment generally given to the elderly. There is no doubt that Cephalus is respected, perhaps not for his intelligence *per se*, but certainly for his age (and wealth). What is the role of the elderly? The old men are constant reminders of the natural deterioration of the **body**, but the complication is in defining a human being's prime. Is the basis to be the body or the soul? If human beings were of no physical value after a certain age, and this was all that mattered, then it would seem to be best for the individual and the city to eliminate them. But wisdom is generally identified with age, for much practical knowledge can only be gained through a lifetime of experience. As Allan Bloom observes:

> Age is [Cephalus'] title to rule, as it is in almost all regimes governed by ancestral custom. Age is a practical substitute for wisdom because, unlike wisdom, it is politically recognizable and easily defined. It is more feasible to teach force to respect age than to teach it to respect wisdom. The reverence for age, and hence antiquity, is one of the strongest ties which can bind a civil society together.[47]

The elderly are also educators of youth; they represent the city's past and generate respect for

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[46] *Republic*, 329 a-c, my emphasis.
[47] Allan Bloom, "Interpretive Essay" on *The Republic of Plato*, p. 312.

history and tradition. In a sense, their presence moderates society's desire for the new. The old men enjoy telling stories about their great achievements in history, but the women in *Lysistrata* do not seem to appreciate these efforts. There is a general disrespect, by both men and women, for the achievements of the opposite sex, and this has made both sexes angry.

The Chorus of Women warns the old men about angering them or else they "will let loose the beast of [their] evil passions, and a very hailstorm of blows will set [the men] yelling for help."[48] The women also prepare to fight, and thus imitate the men by disrobing. Women must "savour of women in the throes of passion," as men must savour of manhood. Of course this scene reminds the reader of Plato's *Republic*, wherein Socrates proposes that men and women of the Guardian class exercise naked together, and wonders aloud whether this would be the funniest consequence of admitting women to that class. An important difference is that Plato's Socrates limited his proposal purely to speech and imagination whereas Aristophanes makes his characters act it out. Aristophanes does not appear to respect a human being's concern for privacy. Or, rather, he violates it in order to remind us of its importance. It is not difficult to imagine this "fight" deteriorating into a public orgy, which is probably why most civilized regimes maintain the custom of covering the body in public.[49]

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[48]It is interesting to recall what Francis Bacon says about women and anger: "Anger is certainly a kind of baseness, as it appears well in the weakness of those subjects in whom it **reigns**: children, women, old folks, sick folks." Extending the analogy, one might suggest that the women are cautioning the men about messing around with an angry bitch (dog). (Francis Bacon, "Of Anger," Essay LVII in *Francis Bacon – A Selection of His Works*, (Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, 1981), p. 188, my emphasis.)

[49]Allan Bloom observes that "Nakedness is forbidden because it encourages licentiousness, because civilized men need some mastery over their sexual appetites. Public nakedness is permissible where sexual desire is not likely to be aroused by it. Men can be naked together because it is relatively easy to desexualize their relations with one another; but the preservation of the city requires the mutual attraction of men and women. The city can forbid homosexual relations, and shame and habit can make the very notion inconceivable to them. But it cannot forbid heterosexual relations, and men and women could hardly be expected to be above attraction to one another at any particular moment. ... Once more, Socrates "forgets" the body, and this forgetting is the precondition of the equality of women. As a political proposal, the public nakedness of men and women is nonsense. Shame is an essential component of the erotic relations between men and women." (Op. cit., p. 382.)

There are important differences between human beings and lesser animals with respect to the sexual act. Dogs do not care where copulation takes place, who sees it, or with what it occurs, but most human beings desire more privacy than dogs. Shame seems to be the basis of why human beings accept certain customs, albeit they are not always ashamed of themselves if they are not caught. Shame is social in nature since it is primarily with respect to one's relationship with others that he feels ashamed. If human beings publically act like dogs in sexual matters, as they surely would resemble if public fornication were commonplace, then perhaps they begin to behave like dogs in other respects as well.

The women are prepared to resemble Aesop's beetle which destroyed the eagle's eggs.[50] They have Lampito and Ismenia on their side, and the men's decrees are worthless. The men see this as anti-democracy and anti-Athens: the women **are** conspiring with foreign enemies and they **are** disrespectful of the Athenian decrees. The Choruses are once again close to a physical confrontation. The old men cannot see the women as anything but traitorous. And what is worse, they are laughing in the men's faces.[51] The women, on the other hand, cannot see the men as anything but disrespectful, uncaring and unyielding. There is no alternative to physical force to resolve the issue, unless the old men are shown that the women do not want to establish tyranny. Words cannot resolve the issue alone; the men must be shown, in deed, that the women are not serious about establishing a tyranny. Lysistrata re-enters greatly discouraged about the women's enterprise, and the Chorus of Old Men finally gets to hear what this enterprise is all about.

The women are anxious to know why their leader has "so gloomy an air." This is how Lysistrata appeared to Calonice at the start of the play, and once again, Lysistrata says she is upset because of the nature of women. It is "the female heart and female weakness [that] so

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[50]The joke here would be that the men have exposed themselves by disrobing, and are vulnerable to a direct attack. This **would** leave them unable to savour of sexual manhood.

[51]Again, it seems that any political action is tyrannical. Of course this movement is even more revolutionary since women are the agitators; women were not allowed to be political. Apart from this political reality, however, one would want to consider the possibility of either the men or Aristophanes believing that the women are especially susceptible to tyrannical souls.

discourages [her]." The women are in heat, and Lysistrata cannot control their desires. The women are all in favour of deserting, and several women have unsuccessfully tried to escape. Aristophanes is evenhanded in his portrayal of the sexual desires of men and women, both being tyrannized by *eros* which makes the sexes want each other continuously. The question for the reader is why the women have an edge over the men? Chastity is more commonly thought of as a virtue for women, and this is traditionally how girls are educated to behave (ie., as Athena and Artemis). In fact, there are ugly names for licentious women. It may be this lifelong education in saying "no" which gives women their power over men. This education also appears to be grounded in nature, for once again, there are potential consequences of intercourse for women which men do not share. Women, therefore, have to be chaste at least until they are married, and when necessary, they seem to be able to return to their earlier teachings for strength.

In illustration of the women's excuses, Aristophanes has Lysistrata confront four (or five) women in addition to the four attempted escapes she recalls to the Chorus. None of the lying women are able to deceive Lysistrata, and no one is allowed to leave the Acropolis. The women have arrived at this state of sexual frenzy in less than five (or six) days of being away from home,[52] and if it is true that women are more continent than men, then one wonders how the men are coping. With her army about to dissolve in shambles, Lysistrata brings out her heavy artillery -- an oracle promises the end to all of life's ills if the women remain united and refrain from amorous commerce. Whereas if the women do not remain united, "'twill be said there is never a more wanton bird in all the world." The prophecy is clear to the Chorus of Women who beseech the younger women to be brave, to bear their calamity of heat, and to return to their posts. In the Chorus' view, it would be shameful for them not to trust the oracle. The Chorus of Women include themselves in their criticism of women, but they are not the women experiencing the calamity. The older women have not been in heat and they are not the ones being tested, so it is easy for them to make the sacrifice. None of

[52]Lysistrata tells one of the women that she must stay on the Acropolis until the fifth day of her purification. Later, Kinesias explains that it has been six days since Myrrhine has washed her child.

the young women are given the opportunity to repudiate the oracle -- they accept the legitimacy of the oracle and the advice of their mother superiors. Hence, with the power of the divine and the support of the Chorus of older Women, who are the natural guardians of morality, Lysistrata manages to keep her army intact. Her artillery is an extravagant promise and threat.

The women are asked to be brave, and the oracle declares that if the women remain continent "Zeus, which doth thunder in the skies, shall set above what was erst below." The Chorus asks Lysistrata if the oracle means that men will be underneath them. Beyond the sexual connotations of this, the improperly treated women could rise above the men in another important respect -- the women **could** rule them and have **everything** they want. The older women **do** represent a threat of revolution and tyranny. Lysistrata is silent on the proper interpretation of the oracle since she obtains her desired response without offering one. Nevertheless, it is curious why the young women accept it so easily. Are they ashamed? Do they want to be brave? Do they want to rule? A possible explanation of their acceptance is that they do not want to be the most "wanton bird in all the world." Although they are accused of being lewd, licentious, immoderate, luxurious, uncontrolled and sexually promiscuous (ie., wanton), this is not a reputation which they would enjoy living with for the rest of their lives. Their nurturing has taught them not to be prostitutes, and there is a good reason for this. Namely, some men enjoy prostitutes periodically, but no man wants a prostitute for his wife, nor is he eager to raise her children. These women want their husbands back home from war; they do not want to be unmarried prostitutes. It is exciting to talk about being wanton from time to time, but in actuality it is not a way of life that most women would choose for themselves. The beauty of Lysistrata's oracle is that it allows different women to obtain different interpretations, each of which results in the same action.

With each of the several possible interpretations, however, is the acceptance of the oracle by all of the women. The women are all religious believers, except perhaps Lysistrata. What accounts for this religiosity? Religion answers many questions which human beings have about the world, and women may be drawn to religion in order to make sense of a potentially

hostile world. They may themselves feel more vulnerable in their greater attachment to the especially vulnerable children they bear. Childbearing may even raise questions for them regarding this "divine" act, for it is an amazing process wherein human seeds become children. And for nine months, the women have an experience that men do not have. The women may be drawn to the divine by the very power of their own body -- what else could explain this miracle but something superhuman? Additionally, women may rely upon religion to help them educate their children in how to behave as a human being in civil society.

With the women solidly reunited, the Chorus of Old Men interrupts to tell the women a fable that was told to them when they were young boys. Melanion, a young man who hated the thought of marriage, fled to the wilds and never returned to civilization because "he had such a horror of women." In the mountains, the chaste Melanion lived with a dog and caught hares with hand-made nets. The old men loathe the disrespectful women as much as Melanion did, and also threaten to abstain from amorous commerce. One doubts whether young men would be so inclined, however. But now that the old men are not ruled by the mad master *eros*, it seems easy for them to live the life of Melanion. The Chorus of Women responds to the fable about Melanion by telling one of their own: Timon withdrew from the world because he could not abide bad men. Although he "had a holy horror of ill-conditioned fellows," he treated women with great tenderness. Unlike Melanion, Timon continued to see other human beings: good men and women. The women, therefore, do not envision an unerotic, solitary life.

In the midst of this conversation between the two Choruses, Aristophanes includes a discussion between an old man and a woman. The old man says that he would fain kiss her, but the woman is unreceptive and threatens to make him cry without onions. He responds in kind by telling her that he would give her a sound kicking. Her response is to acknowledge his "dense forest" of pubic hair, which he likens to his bravery and fierceness. This does not sound like a man who would opt for a life in the wild when he willingly wants to kiss a "dear old woman." This is the first time in the play that an old man has shown a sexual interest. The Choruses and the individuals comprising them are no longer at their boiling points. Their

bantering is playful and is accompanied by sexual innuendos -- there is an apparent kinship between aggression and sexuality. This transformation is in part due to the old men thinking differently about the women's movement. They have learned of the plot to deny sex to the young warriors, and they are convinced of its efficacy. They also must believe that triumph by the women in the bedrooms is different from a permanent rule of women in the city.

At this point in the play, one must question the significance of this "sexual" exchange among the elderly. Until now, sex has only been an activity for the younger men and women. This flirtation amongst the elderly seems to be especially "pornographic," in that it is not commonly accepted for old men and women to publically show their sexual desires. The objection is not that they **have** sexual desires, but rather that there is something repulsive about them acting upon them. Is this because they ought to represent the triumph of reason over desires? According to Cephalus, most old men do lament for the pleasures of youth as if they were no longer alive, but he clearly implies that these are not the better sort, not like wise old Sophocles.[11] Still, most human beings **do** tend to identify with their sexual prime, and the elderly are certainly not in their sexual prime -- they know it, and so do the young. A human being's sexual prime is the time nature has given him, or her, to reproduce. It is a pleasurable activity, but the elderly can no longer fulfill its natural function. Hence, sexual activity by the elderly would be just for pleasure, and with bodies that are visibly not in their prime (ie., not beautiful). Representing ancestoral wisdom, the elderly are often the ones teaching the young the merits of moderation -- certainly not teaching them that pleasure is the highest good.

Lysistrata interrupts the Choruses to reassemble her troops quickly. A young man has been spotted approaching the Acropolis "all afire with the flames of love," and Myrrhine identifies him as her husband. Lysistrata encourages Myrrhine to inflame, torture and torment Kinesias through seductions, caresses, provocations, refusals, and any means she deems appropriate. However, Lysistrata reminds Myrrhine of her oath. Myrrhine assures Lysistrata that she will do this work, but Lysistrata is unprepared to leave the husband and wife alone.

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[11] *Republic*, 329a-c.

Instead, Lysistrata will help Myrrhine "cajole [Kinesias]–and set his passions aflame." Important to the action of the play, then, is the fact that at least some of the men are back home from the war, and this was the result the women had wanted. But because the war is not over, the women now have to live up to their oath. As Leo Strauss observes:

> In the situation as it was at the beginning, the wives' abstinence would have been easy, but for this very reason wholly ineffectual. Only in the situation as it is now can the wives' abstinence be effectual; but it is also much harder now, in particular since it now lacks its primary incentive, which is the desire to bring their husbands home. Still, thanks to Lysistrate's vigorous leadership her design may well succeed, provided the wives are more continent than their husbands. One may say that the husbands' return, which endangers the wives' resolution, may fortify that resolution.[54]

Curiously, though Lysistrata leads the women away, she does not dismiss the old men. Of course she has no authority to do so. But she could have tried either shame or force. That she did not suggests that their presence may assist Lysistrata in some way. What would be accomplished by having the men remain and the women dismissed? First, by keeping the old men in attendance, Lysistrata ensures that they understand both the issue at hand and the women's power. As well, their presence will not influence Myrrhine to be anything but more sensuous; in effect, Myrrhine will resemble a stripper. But why make the women leave? It is unlikely that this indecency is inappropriate for a woman's eye, especially considering how the women talk about sex. It is more likely, however, that the women would influence Myrrhine's behaviour in a way contrary to that desired. Myrrhine is about to perform a sensuous female act, and she may not be able to do so without wondering how the other women are judging her. There has been evidence in the play already that women compete with one another with respect to their womanness, and Myrrhine must not be inhibited in her seductive efforts. Instead, she must concentrate entirely on her husband to convince him to sue for peace.

Kinesias enters complaining about his spasms and convulsions. Lysistrata is unsympathetic and asks him if he is a man. Most definitely he is a man and his erection proves it! Lysistrata orders him to go away, and Kinesias asks her who it is who repulses him.

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[54]Leo Strauss, "The Lysistrate," in *Socrates and Aristophanes*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 205.

Lysistrata identifies herself as the "sentinel of the day" -- a soldier posted on guard. This does not concern Kinesias for he simply asks Lysistrata to call Myrrhine. Again, Lysistrata asks him who he is and he explains that he is Myrrhine's husband, he is the son of Peon.[55] Lysistrata tells him that Myrrhine has talked about him, and that in her eyes, he is the best of all men. This gets Kinesias even more anxious to see his wife, and he offers to give Lysistrata his penis if she delivers Myrrhine to him. Lysistrata appears excited about this and goes off to find his wife. However, Lysistrata does not return to claim her reward from Kinesias; she is only interested in cajoling him in order to increase his frustration. Although given the offer, Lysistrata does not abuse her position of power.

In his solitude, Kinesias admits that life "has no more charms for [him]" since Myrrhine left his house. He is sad to go inside for it is empty and his victuals have lost their tastiness. Kinesias exclaims that "Desire is eating out [his] heart." Importantly, there is more to his relationship with his wife than sex. For the first time in *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes shows that even young men depend on women for more than sex. Women bring a certain charm to a man's whole life. This is similar to what Aristotle says about marriage:

> Between man and wife friendship seems to exist by nature; for man is naturally inclined to form couples -- even more than to form cities, inasmuch as the household is earlier and more necessary than the city, and reproduction is more common to man with the animals. With the other animals the union extends only to this point, but **human beings live together not only for the sake of reproduction but also for the various purposes of life**; for from the start the functions are divided, and those of man and woman are different; so they help each other by throwing their peculiar **gifts** into the common stock. It is for these reasons that both **utility** and **pleasure** seem to be found in this kind of friendship. But this friendship may be based also upon **virtue** and they will **delight** in the fact. And children seem to be a bond of union (which is the reason why childless people part more easily); for children are a good common to both and what is common holds them together.[56]

Marriage has the capacity of being many things, including useful, pleasurable, virtuous and delightful. There are gifts, or charms, to be found in this union, a union which Aristotle

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[55]It is possible that Aristophanes uses the name Kinesias to ridicule the fifth century dithyrambic poet. Aristophanes ridicules him in the *Birds*, and in the *Gorgias*, Plato condemns him for concentrating on pleasure rather than the good.

[56]Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Translated by David Ross, (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 214, my emphases.

thinks is even more basic and natural than a human being's life in a *polis*. In common between Aristotle and Aristophanes is the recognition that the male and female functions are different, different from the start. The union, therefore, benefits both sexes by enabling for a division of labour. Because this union has splintered, neither Kinesias nor Myrrhine are happy; neither person's needs are being met.

Myrrhine enters remaining at a distance from her husband, and tells Lysistrata that she loves Kinesias but he will not let himself be loved. Hence, she says she cannot go to him. Hearing this, Kinesias calls her his little darling and pleads with her to come down to him quickly, but she refuses and he continues to beg. Myrrhine pretends that he does not really care, that he does not want her. But nothing could be more incorrect, for his weapon is actually standing stiff with desire! When Myrrhine says good-bye to him, he pleads with her in the name of their child, whom he has brought along. The child deserves pity for he has not been washed or fed by his mother in six days. Myrrhine says that her son is a poor darling since his father takes poor care of him, and she reluctantly descends to her family exclaiming "What a thing it is to be a mother!" Myrrhine is not coming down as a wife but as a mother. Kinesias is thrilled -- his wife looks younger and prettier, and she looks at him so lovingly. Kinesias' passion is redoubled by Myrrhine's cruelty and scorn. Not to be overlooked is this man's recognition of (and attraction to) his wife's youthful beauty -- the women do not take their youth and beauty seriously for nothing.

Myrrhine descends and kisses her treasure, her child. Kinesias criticizes his wife for letting herself be led away by other women, and asks why she has caused him such pain and suffering by doing so. While asking this, Kinesias attempts to touch Myrrhine who abruptly tells him to keep his hands off her, whereupon he asks about her concerns for their household. Her web and Aphrodite's mysteries are unimportant to Myrrhine, and she will not come home until a sound treaty puts an end to the war. Immediately, Kinesias says he will make her a treaty, but Myrrhine will not come home until it is completed. Until then, she is bound by an oath to not have sex. However, this is not to say that she does not love her husband. With this, Kinesias begs Myrrhine to appease his desire, and only because of

Myrrhine's uneasiness does he tell his servant to take their child home. Myrrhine would not even contemplate having sex in front of her child, but at this point Kinesias seems to care less about modesty.

Myrrhine finally agrees to Kinesias' request, and begins a lengthy exercise of tantalyzing, and thereby tormenting her husband. First, there is the question of where they can do it, and then how she will purify herself before returning to the citadel. Myrrhine asks about her oath, and Kinesias says that he will take the responsibility for it. Myrrhine seems to accept this and continues to tease Kinesias until he admits that he will only think about making peace. Myrrhine runs away leaving Kinesias in utter torment and considering a visit to a brothel. He says that the loveliest woman has cheated him. The Chorus of Old Men sympathizes with Kinesias, and call Myrrhine an "abandoned hussy." Kinesias, however, defends his wife -- she is not a hussy, she is the "sweetest, dearest darling." To no avail, the Chorus begs Zeus to appease Kinesias' desire. The situation now seems to be at its worst, at least for Kinesias and presumably many of the other young men. The Chorus of Old Men is also angry again.

Although the overall conflict is not resolved in *Lysistrata*, one issue has been settled. Namely, women are more continent than men.[57] The physical reality for men is that they must do something to ease their "torment" or it will only get worse. Of course there are several options for men, including "doing it" with their wives, female lovers, female prostitutes, male lovers, male prostitutes, or sheep. Masturbation is also an option, as the women have already identified for themselves. But the only options Aristophanes allows for Kinesias are his wife and female prostitutes, and clearly, the latter are less attractive. Aristophanes confines Kinesias to morally decent, or at least, to more or less civilized kinds of behaviour. Such behaviour is necessary for the success of the wive's strike, but it is also

[57]Leo Strauss makes the same observation. In his words: "We learn immediately why the women are bound to defeat the men: the bodily sign of sexual excitement is much harder to bear or is a much more visible handicap in the case of men than in the case of women; by disregarding everything else the poet proves that continence is harder for men than for women." ("The Lysistrate," p. 206) To this one might add that her very ability to tease and tantalize presumes her own restraint.

necessary for the success of the household and ultimately the city. The sexes naturally produce a unit, or a family, and this requires a certain kind of behaviour from each. Although sexual relations are confined to the household, a household is more than just a place for sex: the household is an important nurturing place for the children, and as Kinesias admits, it also is a place of many charms for men.

One is necessarily drawn into a discussion about morality in this scene of *Lysistrata* because of Aristophanes' audacity in presenting scenes of indecency. The poet shocks his audience by showing: naked men and women; flirtations between the elderly; escalated tensions between the sexes; a man with an erection; and a wife teasing her husband to the point of him considering the need to visit a prostitute. Up until this point in the play, Aristophanes has left the sexual issues more or less to his audience's imagination. Now these very private matters are made public, and as such, they cannot be ignored. Specifically, what are acceptable and unacceptable ways for human beings to behave? Is it acceptable for naked men and women to fight with one another? If they become sexually aroused will public orgies be acceptable? Are men running around with erections an acceptable occurrence? Will men be as "civilized" with the women who tease them, particularly if institutions like marriage become less sacred? These issues of human sexuality are important to Aristophanes, even though he **appears** to laugh them off. True, these scenes are funny, but only because they remind us that this is **not** the way we want our lives to be permanently. The battle between the sexes must not be allowed to cause a dismantling of the institution which we depend upon to fulfill our distinctly human needs, those which contribute to completeness of body and soul and the nurturing of children. Is it simply the war which causes the problems addressed here, or does war merely exacerbate the problems? Regardless of the cause of the perennial problems between the sexes, their "battles," cannot result in a disintegration of marriage. Kinesias does not rape or beat his wife, nor does he purchase the services of a prostitute; and he loves and prefers his wife over any other woman. The union remains sacred to the poet.

Although the sexes naturally form a union which has the potential of being harmonious, the potential for conflict is great. The sexes are different -- they have different

needs and they perform different functions. Much of this seems to result from the differences of the body, reflected most importantly perhaps with respect to whom the responsibility for childbirth and rearing naturally falls. Yet there is more to the tension than the body, since even older men and women, whose bodies have deteriorated, can fail to see each other as friends and allies. The sexes do not appear to understand one another, and once the pleasures of youth disappear, they may discover that they have little in common. While the sexes complain about their human-all-too-human conditions, hardly anyone attempts genuinely to reconcile the differences. Increasingly, however, Aristophanes is also alluding to the individual's own inner tension, which may or may not have anything to do with the opposite sex. People in their youth appear to be tyrannized by *eros*, while the elderly are tormented by fading recollections of their youth or regrets of not having lived the life they would now choose. While there is a war between the sexes, there is also a battlefield in the individual soul.

VI. Reconciliation

The arrival of the Spartan herald begins the formal process of negotiating peace. The Athenians are not reconciled, and it comes as no surprise that the Spartans are the first to sue for peace. Lampito's concern about the Athenian *demos* has been proven correct -- the Athenians have not wanted to listen to common sense, and only briefly was the Magistrate sincerely interested in Lysistrata's advice. Conversely, Lampito has been able to accomplish her task in Sparta, which indicates that there are significant differences between the two regimes, most notably (it would seem) the greater power of the Spartan women. In agreement with this, Aristotle argues that Sparta already was a gynaecocracy:

> Another criticism of the Spartan constitution turns on the **indulgence permitted to women**. This hinders Sparta from attaining either the purpose of its own constitution or the happiness of its citizen body. Just as husband and wife are alike essential parts of the family, so a state should also be considered as almost equally composed of men and women members. In all constitutions, therefore, where the position of women is poorly regulated, one-half of the citizen body must be considered as left untouched by the laws. This is what has actually happened at Sparta. The legislator who made the Spartan code intended to make the whole citizen body hardy; but if he fulfilled that intention, as he obviously did, in regard to the men, he has wholly neglected to achieve it in regard to **the women, who indulge in all sorts of licence and live a luxurious life. The inevitable result, in such a constitution, is the worship of wealth, expecially if--as happens with most military and martial stocks--the citizens are dominated by their wives**. ... There was wisdom in the earliest author of myths when he paired Ares and Aphrodite: the facts show that all martial races are prone to passionate attachments either to men or to women. It was attachments of the latter sort which were common in Sparta; and the result was that, in the days of her hegemony, affairs largely fell into the hands of women. But what is the difference between governors being governed by women and women being actually governors? The results are the same. ... **We may admit that the licence enjoyed by women seems to have come about originally at Sparta in a way which it is easy to understand. The men were absent on expeditions for long periods**. ... Lycurgus indeed attempted, according to tradition, to bring the women too within the range of his laws; but they opposed him, and he had to abandon the attempt. But while we can thus explain what actually happened, and so account for the origin of this defect in the Spartan system, we have to remember that we are not concerned with what can, or cannot, be excused [historically], but with what is actually right or wrong. **The defects in the position of women at Sparta, as we have already suggested, seem not only calculated to produce some lack of harmony in the constitution, if we take that by itself, but also likely to foster the growth of avarice.**[51]

The Spartan constitution promoted the discipline of women for the sake of the military

[51]Aristotle, *Politics*, Translated by Ernest Baker, (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1958), 1269b-1270a, pp. 75-6, my emphases. This is also pointed out by Leo Strauss in his commentary.

support they provided by producing and nurturing men for war, but long periods of isolation from the men gave them the opportunity to soften (ie., satisfy their desires for luxury). A successful military regime can actually exacerbate this love of wealth by showering women with foreign acquisitions. The Spartan regime deteriorated over time in part because its laws did not control the women's love of luxury and wealth. Yet Aristophanes does not show Lampito to be affected by wealth -- like Lysistrata, she appears to be a special kind of woman. Knowing that the Spartans had the advantage at this point in the war, Lampito could have easily rejected Lysistrata's call for peace in order to obtain the Athenian treasury for Sparta. If Lampito was as avaricious as Aristotle argues Spartan women were, then she would have pursued this good.

In the *Republic*, however, Socrates explains to Adeimantus that avarice follows naturally from the kind of regime which Sparta represented. Timocracies,[59] with rulers who love honour (and display courage), deteriorate into oligarchies because of an increasing desire for wealth:

> (S): "And really," I said, "the way it is transformed is plain even to a blind man."
> (A): "How?"
> (S): "The treasure house full of gold," I said, "which each man has, destroys that regime. First they seek out expenditures for themselves and pervert the laws in that direction; they themselves and their wives disobey them."
> (A): "That's likely," he said.
> (S): "Next, I suppose, one man sees the other and enters into a rivalry with him, and thus they made the multitude like themselves."
> (A): "That's likely."
> (S): "Well, then," I said, "from there they progress in money-making, and the more honourable they consider it, the less honourable they consider virtue. **Or isn't virtue in tension with wealth, as though each were lying in the scale of a balance, always inclining in opposite directions?**"
> (A): "Quite so," he said.
> (S): "Surely, when wealth and the wealthy are honoured in a city, virtue and the good men are less honourable."

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[59]Socrates describes Sparta as a Timocracy at 543c and 545a. As Allan Bloom observes: "Sparta, the model of the timocratic regime, is a republic with a long history of stability and is able to defend its liberty courageously and skillfully. Although the rulers secretly lust for money, their love of honour protects their devotion to the public, and they are too ashamed to sacrifice their duty to acquisition. Moreover, if their courage is not that of the educated auxiliaries who are convinced that death is nothing terrible, and if they are somewhat too savage, it is undeniable that they can fight very well." ("Interpretive Essay" on *The Republic of Plato*, p. 418.)

(A): "Plainly."
(S): "Surely, what happens to be honoured is practiced, and what is without honour is neglected."
(A): "That's so."
(S): "Instead of men who love victory and honour, they finally become lovers of money-making and money; and they praise and admire the wealthy man and bring him to the ruling offices, while they dishonour the poor man."[60]

The timocratic (honour-loving) man desires respect from others, especially for his spirited courage, and he does not obtain it once people honour wealth. According to Socrates, he is typically the son of a good man, but he observes that his father is not greatly honoured in the city, and he may even be told to not emulate his father by his mother and the household servants. As Socrates outlines, the mother does this with the son of the aristocratic man because she does not receive any honours when there are none for the man. With respect to the origins of a Timocrat, Socrates says the following to Adeimantus:

(S): "And this is how he comes into being," I said. "Sometimes he is the young son of a good father who lives in a city that is not under a good regime, a father who flees the honours, the ruling offices, the lawsuits, and everything of the sort that's to the busybody's taste, and who is willing to be gotten the better of so as not to be bothered."
(A): "In what way, then, does he come into being?" he said.
(S): "When," I said, "**in the first place, he listens to his mother complaining. Her husband is not one of the rulers and as a result she is at a disadvantage among the other women.** Moreover, she sees that he isn't very serious about money and doesn't fight and insult people for its sake in private actions in courts and in public but takes everything of the sort in an easygoing way; and she becomes aware that he always turns his mind to himself and neither honours nor dishonours her very much. **She complains about all this and says that his father is lacking in courage and is too slack, and, of course, chants all the other refrains such as women are likely to do in cases of this sort.**"
(A): "Yes, indeed," said Adeimantus, "it's just like them to have many complaints."[61]

An interesting factor in both of the above arguments is that women are not without responsibility for the degeneration of kinds of men and kinds of regimes. Their own desires for honour, luxury and wealth are (at least) equally important as the men's desires. Allan Bloom goes so far as to say "Man's fall from the state of innocence is a result of a woman's

[60] *Republic*, 550d - 551a, my emphases. This discussion suggests that Adeimantus himself may suffer from a repressed love of wealth.
[61] Ibid., 549c - 549e, my emphases.

temptings,"[62] which is consistent of course with Adam's transgression in the Garden of Eden. Similarly, in *Lysistrata*, it is not so much the power that mothers have over sons that is being addressed, but rather their power over husbands. The first kind of power is more concerned with the future while the latter is more concerned with the present. These women want an end to the war immediately; they no longer have the patience to educate their sons to be peace-lovers in the hopes of them negotiating peace in the future.

The question which remains, however, is why the Spartan women are successful in forcing their men to sue for peace. Both the Spartan and Athenian men have been denied sex, which they want, but only the Spartans show that they are in fact prepared to negotiate; the Athenian men only claim to be willing to think about negotiating. The most obvious reason for the Spartans taking the first step is that, at this stage of the war, they had the advantage; they can bargain from strength. As J.B. Bury notes:

> By the spring of 411 the situation was that Athens had her northern and Hellespontine confederacy intact, but that on the western coast of Asia little of importance remained to her but Lesbos, Samos, Cos, and Halicarnassus. She was confronted by a formidable Peloponnesian fleet, supported by Persia and by a considerable reinforcement from Sicily -- 22 vessels under Hermocrates, the return of Syracuse for her deliverance.[63]

At this time, the Athenians would be admitting defeat if they approached the Spartans first. If this is the only reason for the Spartan women's success, however, then it has less to do with the differences of the regimes and more to do with the current status of the war, which begs an additional question of whether the Athenians would have sued for peace if Lysistrata had proposed the sex revolt during a time of Athenian superiority. As Lysistrata reminds everyone later, the Athenians were not willing to accept the Spartan plea for peace following the Spartan defeat at Pylos in 425 B.C. because Cleon, who opposed Nicias and the peace party, urged the Athenians to propose unacceptable terms. Clearly, the Spartans are prepared to ask for peace while in **both** superior **and** inferior positions, while the Athenians do not appear nearly so eager to have peace.

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[62]Op. cit., p. 420.
[63]J.B. Bury and Russell Meiggs, p. 308.

The Spartan women may have a greater power over their men because their regime produced warriors. As Bacon observes, "I know not how, but martial men are given to love; I think it is but as they are given to wine, for perils commonly ask to be paid in pleasures."[64] A warriors' extremely spirited soul may desire the pleasures of love more than that of other men, and this could make him more vulnerable to a woman's power. Time with a woman is peaceful for the warrior; he is taken care of, loved and admired. The warrior may be less capable of denying his flattering, gratifying woman her own pleasures, and she may be able to use this weakness to her greater advantage. At least, Bacon and Aristotle appear to agree on this aspect of the warrior's erotic soul.

This contrasts with the democratic Athenian regime which produces strong individuals, placing great stress on individual achievement and gratification. As Socrates argues, however, democracies are prone to degenerate into tyrannies due to the influence of demagogues, and that something similar is also true with respect to the typical democratic man. He becomes tyrannical as he contemns the law in pursuit of fulfilling his infinite unnecessary desires. Satisfaction is pursued with freedom, power and money, and it is this freedom which democracies respect the most which leads them to their decline:

> (S): "Then, summing up all of these things together," I said, "**do you notice how tender they make the citizens' soul**, so that if someone proposes anything that smacks in any way of slavery, they are irritated and can't stand it? **And they end up, as you well know, by paying no attention to the laws, written or unwritten, in order that they may avoid having any master at all.** ... Well, then," I said, "tyranny is probably established out of no other regime than democracy, I suppose -- the greatest and most savage slavery out of the extreme freedom."[65]

Demagogues exploit the city in their own interests, as Cleon did in an effort to become all-powerful. And demagogic appeals to resist, fight, make war (and thus to patriotism) are usually more effective than "effeminate" appeals to peace. In other words, the democracy (Athens) allows individuals to become powerful and satisfy their own ends, regardless of the good of the city. In a timocracy (such as Sparta) the city's good is paramount, even if it

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[64]Francis Bacon, "Of Love," Essay X in *Francis Bacon -- A Selection of His Works*, p. 70.

[65]*Republic*, 563d - 564a, my emphases.

tolerates its citizens to indulge in private desires for wealth. Aristophanes appears to be indicating that if peace is to be secured, the Spartans will have to initiate it. Otherwise, the individualistic Athenians may not participate because it may be in some individual's selfish interest to continue fighting.

The above references to the *Republic* help to understand *Lysistrata*, but they also alert the reader to a tacit dialogue between Plato and Aristophanes about human nature -- the most important aspect of their "discussion" being the role of *eros*. Aristophanes has Lysistrata organize a sex revolt to stop the war, and she is successful in this. In other words, sex -- the most familiar expression of *eros* -- is a powerful "weapon" in the *polis* since it is a powerful force in the souls of human beings. Similarly, it can be argued that Plato identifies *eros*, in its fuller essence, as the political problem for justice in the *polis*. As Leon Craig observes:

> *Eros*, man's desiring nature, the energy behind all of his strivings, is a problem for justice from beginning to end. Indeed, *eros* is the problem for justice, in that were man not erotic there would be no need for justice. *Eros*, as the motor of life, recoils from death, from the threatened annihilation of self. Because it is essentially selfish in all its incarnations, from desire for bodies to desire for fame to desire for knowledge, *eros* is a chronic threat to the harmonious constitution, whether of cities or of souls. It would tyrannize men, collectively and individually, were it left unbridled.[64]

Having recognized the problem of *eros*, the question becomes how *eros* is to be controlled. In *Lysistrata*, everyone except the Liberating General is powerfully swayed by his or her own erotic nature: the young men and women are tormented, and even the old men and women turn out to be flirtatious. Lysistrata is the only person who seems to be able to master her desiring nature, and the only clue Aristophanes gives his audience for explaining this is that she has good judgement and has been educated. In her, the rational element seems the strongest, but this is quite uncommon. It would seem that only rare individuals are able to control their erotic natures.

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[64]Leon H. Craig, *An Introduction To Plato's "Republic,"* The University of Alberta, p. 202. For textual evidence of this in the *Republic* see 458d-e and 572d-575a.

Upon arrival, the Spartan herald is not immediately treated seriously. The Magistrate jokes with him until he admits that he has official Spartan documents and is not concealing a lance. In defence of the Magistrate, the Athenians would not expect the Spartans to request peace at this stage of the war, It does not make sense until the herald explains that the men of Sparta are also being denied access to their women until peace is concluded. The Magistrate now understands the women's movement to be "a general conspiracy embracing all Greece," and orders the herald to organize the sending of Spartan ambassadors for negotiations in Athens. The Magistrate says he will organize the Athenians, who, in his estimation, will comply willingly. Events have proven that Lysistrata's movement is not meant to establish tyranny in Athens, but rather to end the war in all of Greece, just as she had said. The Magistrate knows that his men are also suffering, so much so that he does not even have to discuss this with his superiors -- they will accept the offer from the Spartans to negotiate.

With peace now more or less a foregone conclusion, Aristophanes has the Choruses reconcile, even though the old men still think that the women are savage and shameless. The women tacitly agree with this characterization by telling the men they were stupid to wage war on them, when they could have them for faithful friends and allies. The old men assert that their hatred will never cease towards women, whereupon the victorious women dress the old men and remove a huge gnat from their eye -- the men are now presentable and their pain along with their clouded vision is alleviated, for which they are (in turn) grateful. The women even kiss the reluctant men, who then admit what has been a commonplace throughout the ages: that it is "impossible to live with the baggages, impossible to live without 'em!" Although the gnat has annoyed the old men for a long time, they have not realized the cause of the pain, and would have continued to be annoyed by it. One wonders what the gnat metaphorically represents. Jeffrey Henderson likens the gnat to the men's anger, which is now lessened by the women's kind gestures.[67] Although it is true that the men are not as angry as they were, their pledge to remain hateful of the women tends to weaken Henderson's argument. One gets the impression that the old men have been irritated, or blinded, by

[67]Jeffrey Henderson, p. 188.

whatever the gnat represents prior to the women's seizure of the Acropolis. The women dress the men to look once again like men, and this suggests that their pain is caused more by their pride. The old men have lost their battle with nature and are no longer the virile men they once were. At least now the women have restored their appearance of manhood. That the women understand male nature was implicit in their (doubtless empty) threat to castrate them -- the women may in fact be able to "see" the essence of man's pride."

So, however things work out for Athens and Sparta, peace between the sexes does not appear to be on the most solid foundation. The old men do not want the sexes to think of each other as enemies, but they personally vow never to let their hatred cease. This "peace" is more like an armed truce, negotiated following a voluminous catalogue of insults and threats by each sex against the other, and peace has resulted simply because of the men's defeat and the women's victory. The old men reluctantly accept their inferiority and are urged by the women not to mess with fire. Thus Aristophanes may be pointing to a permanent tension between the sexes. Nietzsche argues that the sexes misunderstand one another because they "deceive themselves about each other -- because at bottom they honour and love only themselves (or their own **ideal**, to put it more pleasantly). Thus man likes woman peaceful -- but woman is *essentially* unpeaceful, like a cat, however well she may have trained herself to seem peaceful."

Nevertheless, the women say that they are capable of being faithful friends and allies to the men. What exactly do the women mean by this? Part of this more harmonious relationship appears to entail the women taking care of their men, which serves to make not

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"That the gnat has something to do with knowledge of **human** nature is also indicated in the *Clouds*. When Strepsiades arrives at the Thinkery, a student of Socrates explains that one of Socrates' recent investigations was whether gnats hum through their mouth or through their anus. Socrates had concluded that because the gnat's intestine is narrow and slender, air would go violently to its anus. Strepsiades, therefore, thinks that Socrates has "intestinal insight." The issue for Aristophanes is that Socrates spends his time thinking about natural philosophy rather than addressing, and being careful of, human or political philosophy. The women in *Lysistrata* do not seem to have this problem. (Aristophanes, *Clouds*, in *Four Texts on Socrates*, 155-168.)

"Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Translated by Walter Kaufmann, (New York: The Modern Library, 1968) IV. #131, p. 277, my emphases.

just the men, but also the women happy. The women want their husbands to look like they are being taken care of, for other people will regard it as a bad reflection on the women if they are not. As well, the women want to be able to talk to their husbands, and have their husbands consider their opinions. The relationship, then, is to be more than sexual. The women do not advocate political or social equality in the sense of treating both sexes the same -- they recognize that there are differences between men and women, and that their union is rather a mutually beneficial one. Rousseau describes the relationship in even more glowing terms:

> The social relationship of the sexes is an admirable thing. This partnership produces a moral person of which the woman is the eye and the man is the arm, but they have such a dependence on one another that the woman learns from the man what must be seen and the man learns from the woman what must be done. If woman could ascend to general principles as well as man can, and if man had as good a mind for details as woman does, they would always be independent of one another, they would live in eternal discord, and their partnership could not exist. But in the harmony which reigns between them, everything tends to the common end; they do not know who contributes more. Each follows the prompting of the other; each obeys, and both are masters.[70]

Rousseau argues that the male and female natures are different, but complementary. A mutually beneficial, harmonious partnership requires knowledge of both particularities and generalities -- able to apply the general truths to the particular case. This harmony appears to be the combination of both the male and female natures, which Lysistrata exemplifies -- she has learned what to see from her father and the city's elders and is about to tell the men what must be done. Generally, Aristophanes shows the sexes wanting each other continuously (whether it be for sex or other "charms"), and both men and women are grateful for peace which allows for this. At this stage of the relationship, the women appear to be educating the men about what must be done to keep them happy. Namely, they do not want to be separated from their husbands, young girls require husbands, and they do not want their everyday activities (ie., the marketplace) rendered chaotic. They also do not appreciate being utterly shut out of discussions about the common goals of the city. Although Aristophanes does not

[70]Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, Book V, p. 377.

say it in so many words, he shows that the women both want, and to some extent deserve, more respect.

The Chorus of Women sing a song about the benefits of peace in the household and the city. There have been enough misfortunes and calamities, and they desire to sing only about the good: money is freely available if peace is concluded; and supper is being arranged with lavish entertainment. Everyone should feel at home -- except the door will be shut in their faces! This comic twist perhaps alludes to the possibility of future strife, as well as to poverty in the city following the long war. This peace is welcomed after a long history of suffering, but the need for necessities, like food, and desire for luxuries, purchased with money, may continue to threaten this peace.

The Chorus of Old Men greet the Spartan Envoys by emphasizing their obvious sexual torture, which is similar to how the Magistrate greeted the herald. The Spartans do not want to waste any time and ask to see the Athenian ambassadors. The Chorus does not call any ambassadors since Lysistrata will be the one who is required. For the first time in the play, Lysistrata is summoned by name by a man, and the Athenian hopes she will be compassionate with respect to their condition. The Athenian men are also in a dreadful condition, and are even close to opting for homosexual intercourse -- clearly, all of the women in Athens have remained united. The Chorus warns the Spartans to put on their clothes because one of the fellows who mutilated the Hermae might see them. The comic display of tortured phalli ends with the preparation for serious negotiations. Again, however, Aristophanes insinuates that a threat to peace remains -- conspirators may be present, like those who, prior to the Sicilian expedition, mutilated the Hermae.

A Spartan repeats his desire to negotiate peace, and an Athenian says his countrymen are of the same mind. Lysistrata is required since "she is the only person will bring us to terms." The Chorus explains that Lysistrata has heard their voices and is on her way. The Chorus introduces her as the boldest and bravest of womankind, and urges her to be both uncompromising and conciliatory, exacting and yet yielding, haughty but also condescending. This will require both skill and artfulness. As Leo Strauss points out, Lysistrata must be both

good and bad"[71] -- or one might even say, male and female. Such contrasting qualities of generals are conveniently outlined by the Xenophonic Socrates in *Memorabilia*:

> (SOCRATES): "But then that is only a small part of generalship. For a general must also be capable of furnishing military equipment and providing supplies for the men; he must be resourceful, active, careful, hardy and quick-witted; he must be both gentle and brutal, at once straightforward and designing, capable of both caution and surprise, lavish and rapacious, generous and mean, skilful in defence and attack; and there are many other qualifications, some natural, some acquired, that are necessary to one who would succeed as a general."[72]

Lysistrata is confident in her abilities. She has given this matter a great deal of thought and she has already displayed an appropriate nature for the task: she did not compromise on her leadership of the women; she did not yield to public pressure to change her opinions; and she has obtained everything she wanted. Lysistrata admits that her task will be easy, provided the men do not indulge in masculine love (ie., as long as they confine their desires to women). This proviso obviously has a bearing on all civil life at all times. Lysistrata then orders the gentle goddess Peace (Reconciliation) to bring forward the Athenians and Spartans. This beautiful woman remains by Lysistrata's side as a symbol of what the men can look forward to. Lysistrata is "but a woman," but she thinks that she has common sense and discriminating judgement. She has been blessed by nature, and the wise teachings of her father and the elders of the city have helped her further to develop her talents. Unlike the Chorus of Women earlier, Lysistrata's qualifications are not that she is a woman who has produced children for the city, or that her religious honours make her indebted to offer the city advice. Lysistrata's qualifications are that she has a good mind and has thought about these issues; she has had a good education by her father and other wise ones of the city.

Lysistrata's rationale for peace is, first, that the Athenians and Spartans, as Greeks, share common deities and religious ceremonies; but instead of celebrating together, they have

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[71]Leo Strauss, "The Lysistrate," p. 208. The qualities described by the Chorus are "seemingly incompatible" according to Strauss.

[72]Xenophon, *Xenophon IV: Memorabilia*, Translated by E.C. Marchant & O.J. Todd, The Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1979), III.i.6-7, p. 171. Here Socrates speaks to a young potential general (ie., there is more to generalship than tactics).

been destroying one another while the Barbarian threatens both. By not taking precautions against the Persians, the whole of Greece is at risk of being destroyed. Both the Athenians and the Spartans are insular in their thinking.[73] Lysistrata's second point is that each city has received valuable support from the other in the past: the Spartans obtained Athenian assistance in 464 B.C. following an earthquake and the revolts of the Messenians and helots; and the Athenians were given back their freedom after the Spartans ousted Hippias and the Thessalians from power in 510 B.C. There is a natural partnership of Sparta and Athens, like that of men and women. While the Athenians and Spartans agree that the Spartans were very wrong in forgetting their past, the Athenian's mistakes are not admitted to, and Lysistrata does not force the issue. Luckily, the Spartans are not concerned at the moment in hearing any such admission, being easily distracted, as are the Athenians, by the beauty of Reconciliation, or perhaps even of Lysistrata. More than ever before, the men are discovering that they have something in common, and it is not a religious ceremony -- they all want to embrace "Reconciliation"! Lysistrata's arguments seem directed more towards the Athenian audience than to the characters in the play. It is perhaps because her audience is Athenian that she does not force them to admit their mistakes.

The Spartans are ready to settle as long as they obtain Pylos, which is initially unacceptable to the Athenians because they would not have a city to "stir up trouble in." Lysistrata does not expect the Athenians to cease such activity, and advises the Athenians to ask for other territory in return. Unrealistically, the Athenians ask for Echinus, the Maliac gulf and the two legs of Megara. Although the Spartans dislike the idea, their physical desires outweigh their political concerns. The allies of both sides do not even have to be consulted since they also only want to be with their wives. Thus, the agreement is rapidly reached, and Lysistrata invites the men to a dinner on the Acropolis where they will exchange oaths and

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[73]The threat of a Persian attack would not be new: the Greek cities of Asia Minor were conquered by Cyrus in the 6th Century B.C.; Darius marched through Thrace into Scythia sometime around 512; a Greek fleet was defeated at Lade in 494; Darius reduced Thrace and Thasos in 490, and invaded Euboea (destroying Eretria) crossing into Marathon; and Xerxes invaded Thermopylae in 480 and razed Attica. (Sir Paul Harvey, pp. 315-6.)

pledges and be reconciled with their wives. As Jeffrey Henderson points out:

> In this scene the proceedings descend into pure farce: the sexual theme displaces the political, and hereafter the situation is, Now that that's settled, let's celebrate! Aristophanes' concern was to present a plausible case for the justice and desirability of a negotiated peace, and he had no desire to confront the concessions that Athens would have had to make on any realistic appraisal of her situation.[74]

Peace is more important than its terms. But what if the terms are politically unacceptable, given the Athenian *demos*? Wouldn't this mean a continuation of the war until the power of one side is almost obliterated, in fact similar to how the Peloponnesian War ended with Athens "crippled, impoverished, and at the mercy of the Spartan Lysander."[75]

The Chorus of Women repeat its promise to give gifts of ornaments, clothes and food to anyone who wants or needs them. However, if any person comes near their door, he should beware of the dog. Again, the Chorus' offer is closed with a comic twist which points to the possibilities of poverty in the city and future strife. The Chorus is pleased that peace has been negotiated, but there are problems within the city which must be addressed. For example, there are conflicts between people in the streets of Athens: a market lounger is prepared to block the after-dinner procession, but a slave, who is in charge of organizing the event, is adamant that this man should disappear and not annoy the Spartans. The lounger departs but returns when the procession is in progress.

An Athenian is the first to comment on the success of the merry banquet. The Spartans were charming, which is attributed to alcohol which makes every man wise. When men are sober they act like fools, implying that ambassadors should always be drunk. When they are sober, they imagine a great deal and do not understand each other; alcohol is a constructive ingredient for "intercourse." In their present state of drunkenness, the Athenian would even enjoy war songs sung by the Spartans, which is exactly what happens. The Spartan Chorus sings a song in honour of both cities, recalling the great battle at Artemisium and Leonidas' heroism at Thermopylai. This is what Lysistrata had told the warriors to

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[74]Jeffrey Henderson, p. 204.
[75]Sir Paul Harvey, p. 58.

remember. Artemis is called upon to keep the cities united, but instead it is Lysistrata who gives a final address. Aristophanes' inclusion of Lysistrata at this point confirms that peace has not been negotiated by the intervention of any of the gods, and maintaining the peace should not be left to the gods either. Lysistrata reunites the Spartan and Athenian women with their husbands, and cautions everyone to "be heedful to avoid like mistakes for the future." This advice is given to the Athenians and Spartans, as well as to husbands and wives. Lysistrata does not ask for any divine assistance in these human concerns, although at no point in the play does she openly express any impiety, much less expel the gods from the city.

The play concludes with two religious songs by the Athenians and the Spartans. The Greeks do have gods in common, as Lysistrata reminded them. Further comparisons of the songs show that the Athenians are less patriotic than the Spartans, as demonstrated in part by their silence regarding their patron deity, Athena, "the utterly warlike." As Leo Strauss observes:

> The Spartan maidens shall glorify Athena, the utterly warlike. The play celebrating peace ends with a praise of the warrior goddess. As we have learned from the *Peace*, there is no peace that is not followed sooner or later by war, be it only a war against barbarians, or that can be preserved without the threat of war. The *Lysistrate* does not end with a joint song of the Spartans and the Athenians. **As is indicated by the final Athenian and Spartan songs, the reconciliation between the two cities requires that the differences between them be not obliterated**: The peace was initiated by the Athenian Lysistrate, who trusted in the power of Aphrodite in Sparta, and Lysistrate's conceit originated in Aristophanes, who had been brought up by Dionysos. Only the Spartans praise Athena in the final songs.[76]

One is left wondering, then, what all of this means for women in the *polis*. The women in *Lysistrata* do not become permanent governors in the *polis*. Instead, they return to their households and seem to do so with pleasure. The women have not aspired to become legislators in the city; their preoccupation is with the health of their household. But then do women receive social justice? Women do not directly rule the city, presumably because of their inability to equal men as warriors, and the city cannot ignore the reality of having to defend itself. The men fight in wars and so the men must decide how best to do that. This

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[76]Leo Strauss, "The Lysistrate," p. 210, my emphasis.

governance by men, however, has the potential effect of men ignoring the needs of women, as Lysistrata criticizes the men for doing. For full political equality of women in the city, one would have to forget the body, beginning with the fact that women are generally weaker warriors. But what is perhaps more important is that they bear children, one at a time, and cannot be so readily sacrificed in war. The bodily differences cannot be ignored. As Myrrhine exclaims, what a thing it is to be a mother.

Nevertheless, what has been shown by Aristophanes (and Plato), is the woman's immense power over the man. The women have their husbands do what they want in *Lysistrata*. Rousseau's observations regarding this issue are most appropriate:

> Could I forget that precious half of the **Republic** which creates the happiness of the other and whose gentleness and wisdom maintain peace and good morals? Amiable and virtuous countrywomen, the fate of your sex will always be to govern ours. It is fortunate when your chaste power, exercised solely in conjugal union, makes itself felt only for the glory of the State and the public happiness! Thus did women command at Sparta and thus do you deserve to command at Geneva. What barbarous man could resist the voice of honour and reason in the mouth of a tender wife? **And who would not despise vain luxury seeing your simple and modest attire which, from the luster it derives from you, seems the most favourable to beauty?** It is for you to maintain always, by your amiable and innocent dominion and by your insinuating wit, love of laws in the State and concord among the citizens; to reunite, by happy marriages, divided families; and above all to correct, by the persuasive sweetness of your lessons and by the modest graces of your conversation, the extravagances our young people adopt in other countries, whence, instead of the many useful things from which they could profit, they bring back, with a childish tone and ridiculous airs adopted among debauched women, only admiration for I know what pretended grandeurs, frivolous compensations for servitude, which will never be worth as much as august freedom. **Therefore always be what you are, the chaste guardians of morals and the gentle bonds of peace; and continue to exploit on every occasion the rights of the heart and of nature for the benefit of duty and virtue.**[77]

One hopes that women will encourage men to become what is also good for the city. But this requires, first of all, that women be educated. Rousseau, in informing the women about their wonderful powers, is also indicating how they are to be properly used; their wholesome political life requires that they be chaste, honourable, reasonable, modest, amiable, innocent, lovers of laws, and guardians of morals. One suspects that Aristophanes would agree.

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[77]Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Second Discourse (On The Origin And Foundations Of Inequality Among Men)*, Translated by Roger D. & Judith R. Masters, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), p. 89, my emphases. Ironically, Rousseau begins this paragraph by saying that **he** cannot forget (the precious half of) the Republic.

VII. Conclusion

This commentary of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* began with the admission that the play is a fantasy. That it is a fantasy, and the reasons for why this is so, is interesting in itself, since this understanding reveals certain beliefs that we, the readers, consider to be important about political life. For example, is the power of sexual desire stronger than the reasons for war? Most readers would argue that the attempt to deny sexual satisfaction to the city's warriors would **not** successfully stop a war. There is a real possibility that many men, and many women for that matter, would not or could not comply with **these** terms for peace, given that there are some obvious alternatives. It does not, as we say today, take a "rocket-scientist" to recognize this about *Lysistrata*. So why, then, ought we to take Aristophanes seriously? What evidence suggests that there is anything here to take seriously? Not that much on the surface, perhaps, but when we dig beneath the surface, we begin to see that there is more to Aristophanes than farcical entertainment based on fantastic escapades. In an attempt to reach some kind of summary judgement about *Lysistrata*, it is perhaps best to return to the surface of the play and remind ourselves of some of the points where the audience is inclined to laugh. For these are times when the poet challenges his audience to examine their reactions. Why **are** certain situations ridiculous or absurd? What do they reveal about the human situation?

The most obviously humorous episodes in the play are when the old men are bested by the women, when Kinesias is tormented by his wife, and when the warriors walk onto stage with erections. These are, of course, jokes about our sexual natures -- that we are one of two sexes, and that the sexes are not identical. A human being is born either male or female, and as we age, certain differences emerge which have profound implications for what our responsibilities, needs and satisfactions are. The sexes naturally attract one another, and the result in the human case, as with other animals, is a continuation of the species. But this does not mean that there is a natural harmony between the sexes, at least not one that occurs without special effort. For as long as there have been two sexes, it appears that there has been a certain tension, the so-called war between the sexes. Even with only a superficial

understanding of *Lysistrata*, one would be hard-pressed not to see this as one of Aristophanes' concerns in the play. In fact, this is most likely Aristophanes' "virtue" for modern readers since he not only recognizes the problem, but also has women triumph over men through their own initiative! From a historicist viewpoint, this would certainly be a man who was "ahead of his time."

As this commentary of *Lysistrata* has indicated, however, it is not likely that Aristophanes is the ally of modern-day feminism that many today would view him to be. True, he shows that the women have great power over the men, and that at least one woman is capable of formulating a very grand political action which corrects the many errors made by men. But the women ultimately return to their households to take care of their husbands, servants and children. Moreover, there is every indication that the women desire this; they do not aspire to become legislators or magistrates in the city. The men continue to make the laws and administer the treasury, though perhaps with a better awareness of what is involved in serving the common good. Specifically, the women cannot, and should not, be taken for granted. The household, wherein most of a human being's private needs can be met, cannot be altogether ignored by men in the Assembly. Bearing and nurturing children may be of equal significance with the task of defending the city. These are the two fundamental activities of the city -- producing children, and defending one's city -- and there are good reasons why the one naturally falls to the women and the other to the men. For all of its radical features, the play tacitly ratifies the traditional view that women's responsibilities are connected more with the private than with the public, whereas the opposite is true of the men. Yet Aristophanes, speaking through Lysistrata, makes us more aware that the two realms are not mutually exclusive, that the private functions require good laws and conventions, and the public functions require knowledge of the private to be able to accommodate its needs through laws and conventions. As well, the sexes themselves not merely need, they **want**, one another. Both realms benefit from productive intercourse, which is what Lysistrata achieves by denying sexual intercourse and forcing verbal intercourse.

On the other hand, Aristophanes does not simply side with women. When one thinks about it, the Chorus of Women's claiming the right to govern because they bear children is rather humorous. That they have an **interest** in good government does not ensure a competance for it. And in fact, most of the women portrayed in *Lysistrata* care mainly about two things: having their beauty admired, and enjoying domestic pleasures. But are vanity and pleasure what legislators ought foremost to be aiming at? For that matter, is peace always what is best for a regime? Don't we sometimes **have** to fight? Shouldn't we sometimes prefer to fight?

The sexes are complementary, and Aristophanes' best "solution" to the war between them seems to include several parts: that women be properly educated; that women continue to bear and nurture children and manage the household; that men not take women for granted in either their public or private functions; and that women recognize, and be satisfied with, their indirect influence in the city as a result of their power over men. With a somewhat better understanding of the other sex, both the men and the women return to their traditional roles. One might say that the women's extreme measures, which are laced with excessive vulgarity, lead to a certain kind of political moderation. Leo Strauss argues that this is a characteristic of the entire Aristophanean corpus:

> The Aristophanean comedy achieves the right mean, not by avoiding vulgarity on the one hand and transcendent wisdom on the other, but by integrating vulgarity and transcendent wisdom into a whole that can, among other things, convey the moderate political message. The Aristophanean comedy circles around the mean between vulgarity and transcendent wisdom, ie., it avoids it while pointing toward it. It is extreme in both directions: It is too low and too high for gentlemen."[11]

Aristophanes, at least in *Lysistrata*, ultimately comes down on the side of *nomos* -- that is, of laws and customs and conventions -- as being essential for the well-being of most human beings and the *polis* as a whole. In this he may be right.

But what does Lysistrata herself represent? There is no doubt that she is an extraordinary woman, indeed a human being, as evidenced by her intelligence, political

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[11]Leo Strauss, "The Wasps," in *Socrates and Aristophanes*, p. 135.

leadership, practical political knowledge and apparent lack of narrow self-interestedness. Only briefly does she acknowledge her husband (ie., her private life), and much of her character she attributes to the teachings of her father and the wise counsel of the city's elders (possibly both male and female). She has a respect for tradition and the duties performed by both women and men. What she apparently desires is an end to a very destructive war, for both private and public reasons. Because this is the only Aristophanean comedy with its title designating a human being, one presumes that understanding Lysistrata's character is fundamental to understanding the entire play. As already indicated, however, this is a very difficult task since Aristophanes conceals a great deal about her. At no point does the reader find a soliloquy by Lysistrata outlining her purpose, background or a comprehensive understanding of political life. Even her metaphoric solution to ending the war (ie., what women do with wool) remains somewhat perplexing. Hence, one is left to piece together her character, but with very little evidence to go on: that she is a "Liberating General"; that she was born with discriminating judgement; and that her education was of importance to her father, and she learned "wise" teachings from the city's elders. Her education **liberated** her from traditional thinking -- otherwise, she would not be organizing this **female** movement -- but this education did not eliminate her respect for these traditions, nor blind her to the concerns and limitations of ordinary people. Her natural discriminating judgement was reinforced through proper nurturing, and she is now apparently self-sufficient. One might speculate that the key to her greater self-sufficiency is that while born a female, she was educated by a man, and now represents a kind of harmonious synthesis between the masculine and the feminine in her soul. She may have achieved in her own soul what most human beings obtain only through the partnership of marriage.

Lysistrata appears to be Aristophanes' version of a politically astute Socrates (in contrast to the decidely unpolitical Socrates portrayed in the *Clouds*): while the Aristophanean Socrates is useless in the city, Lysistrata is most useful; while this Socrates undermines the gods, Lysistrata reinforces them; and while this Socrates wastes his time studying external nature, Lysistrata has obviously spent her time studying **human** nature. Of course this

characterization of Lysistrata is much like the "beautified" Socrates portrayed by Plato and Xenophon, which then points to the long-standing rivalry between poetry and philosophy in regard to wisdom and being potential educators of men. What appears to separate the two is the poetic attachment to *nomos*. A persuasive argument for this could be that Aristophanes depends on the public's praise and support. But perhaps equally important is the poet's recognition that radical questioning ought to be done privately, and in a way that does not weaken ordinary people's respect for *nomos*. Lysistrata, therefore, as Aristophanes' philosophic woman -- a kind of female counterpart to Plato's Philosopher-King -- may be constrained in public by the poet's recognition of the need for discretion, or prudence, in politics.

The poet's own prudence is demonstrated in his teaching regarding the sexes and education, since understanding it requires considerable effort in digging below the surface account. This means that his teaching remains concealed from most people, which is prudent. But the play may also manifest the poet's prudence in another respect, containing within it a practical political proposal for the cities of Greece. Aristophanes was not neutral regarding the Peloponnesian War; *Lysistrata* was his third and final "peace play." What, then, might be the practical proposal being suggested by the poet? If the women are seen as the peace party of the male citizenry, while the men represent the war party, there may be a practical analogue to the various elements of the women's plot. The peace-lovers in Athens secretly conspire with the Spartans, and following a revolution in Athens, the Spartans approach the Athenians to negotiate peace. In other words, if certain Athenian men (ie., peace-loving non-demagogues) were able to establish secret contacts in Sparta, and then temporarily overthrow the current Athenian regime (and most importantly, gain control of the treasury), the Spartans could be convinced to negotiate peace. This interpretation of the play is best articulated by Leo Strauss:

> Both the wives' strike and the women's coming to power are impossible. Yet in the *Lysistrate* the women are the peace party and the men are the war party. Let us assume that the women stand for the men favoring peace, and the men stand for the men favoring war. In that case the play would show that the only possible way to obtain peace in the circumstances is by a change of regime in Athens, the coming to

> power of the kind of men who would need the support of Sparta to control the *demos* and for this reason will already have made contacts with Sparta, just as Lysistrate does. Such a policy would require the utmost secrecy and therefore an ostensible policy concealing the preparation for the change of regime. The action of the *Lysistrate* reflects this state of things in a laughable manner, inasmuch as the peace party treats the sex strike as a strict secret, while it does not counteract the impression that it aims at political subversion, the setting up of "tyranny." The laughable character of the action of the play is limited entirely to the sex strike. One wonders whether the change of regime--as distinguished from that change of regime which was effected by Peisthetairos--is not the poet's serious proposal. In that case the *Lysistrate* would come closer to suggesting a serious political proposal than any other play."[9]

Coincidentally, a revolution did occur in Athens in 411 B.C., and the Athenian who masterminded this political action had an association with Sparta. Unfortunately, however, Alkibiades had become an object of suspicion in Sparta because of his seduction of the king's wife, and his secret negotiations with the Persians. Nevertheless, one wonders if Aristophanes is looking to Alkibiades, or someone like him, who has the negotiating talents to be able to restore peace in Greece.

The difficulty that arises in this analogy is why the Spartans would be prepared to negotiate peace. How would a peace party in Athens convince the Spartans that it is in their best interest to have peace, especially when they were winning the war? But as noted earlier in this commentary, the warlike Spartans had already shown themselves prepared to negotiate peace, whether their own situation was one of strength or weakness. The same willingness could have been expected in 411 B.C. And apart from this, Lysistrata stresses the important commonalities between Athens and Sparta; the common ceremonies and deities, and the demonstrations of friendship in the past, are factors that bind the two regimes together. But perhaps even more important is their common enemy: as Lysistrata explains, while the Greeks continue cutting each other's throats, "all the while the Barbarian is yonder threatening you [both]!" This is what Lysistrata considers to be her "first point." It would be in Persia's interest to let the Greeks destroy each other before taking control. Historical events show that Persia did have designs on Greece, and that within four years of peace, Sparta was at war

[9]Leo Strauss, "The Lysistrate," pp. 212-3. Peisthetairos, in the *Birds*, establishes a utopia in the sky, called Cloudcuckootown, where he rules both mankind and the gods by controlling the food supply.

once again. Although Aristophanes is no soothsayer his political insight was proven to be correct, and his formula for peace may have been successful had it been acted upon. In this aspect of the poet's teaching, however, there are further questions which remain unanswered. For example, do Athens and Sparta have a natural kinship, like women and men? Are the differences of the two regimes naturally compatible?

This commentary has argued, and to a certain degree illustrated, that Aristophanes is not simply a "comic poet." His serious thoughts are masked by humour which accomplishes the intended result of being read only as fantastic entertainment by less serious readers, whose very lack of serious thoughtfulness is potentially dangerous. Yet the study of one play does not reveal Aristophanes' comprehensive understanding of politics. This is not to suggest, however, that Aristophanes' role as a teacher is unimportant -- quite the opposite. While drawing the reader's attention to certain important questions and their at least partial answer, Aristophanes points beyond them to the permanent, fundamental questions that are never finally answered.

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